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JOE PETE

JOE PETE

BY

FLORENCE E. McCLINCHEY



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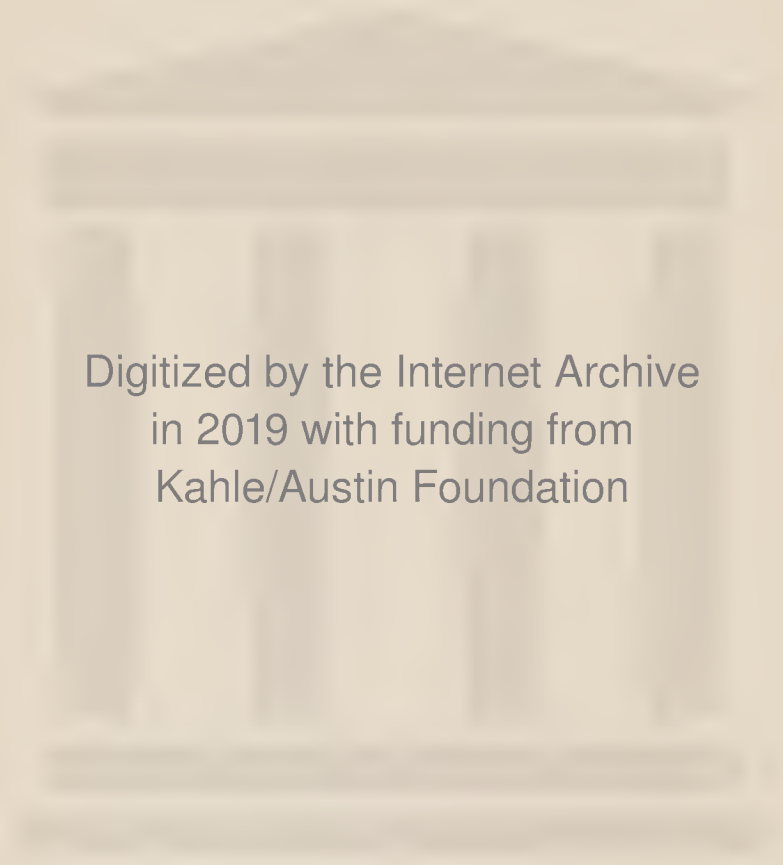
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JOE PETE

I

JOE PETE

The little clearing in the forest gleamed in the moonlight like a round silver disk. It was fringed with spruce trees which leaned slantingly toward the clearing, ready to catch any small bit of news and pass it on to their tree neighbors in low whispering chuckles. The Indians all know that the spruce trees are the forest gossips, taking every word the winds bring them, passing and re-passing it until the entire woods knows the secret and quivers with silent, secret laughter.

A narrow, deeply trodden trail led across to the middle of the clearing. There stood a group of towering spruce trees somberly guarding a small, white-washed, two-room log cabin from great, searing heat in summer and wild, bitter winds in winter. They were also a screen, hiding the little cabin from the moonlight. One walking at night might have passed close on the trail without knowing a house was there but for a window at one side of the cabin. This window gave the cabin a one-eyed appearance, and caught the rays of light that sifted through the thick spruce branches in such a way that it seemed to wink knowingly back at the moon as if to say, "I know many things about life too which I shall never tell."

But withal it was a veiled, fairly decent wink. The window was heavily enough curtained so that one could not see entirely into the soul behind the eye.

Noises which shocked the ear suddenly broke the silence of the clearing. Groans, sobs, and finally the wild, animal shriek of a primitive woman in great agony came from the cabin, and awakened the nesting white-throats in the spruce branches to faint, lovely calls of protest.

The cabin door opened slowly, and an Indian carrying a pail lumbered out to a hole in the ground which served as a well. The tin pail shimmered like a vessel of gold as he leisurely dipped and filled it, and the over-dripping water left a silvery trail which marked his return to the cabin.

With that last shriek of anguish, Mabel, Joe's wife, had given birth to a child. She lay on a filthy bed in one corner of the larger room. The only other furniture in the room was a small stove, a table, a box nailed on the wall for a cupboard, and two broken chairs.

Joe placed the pail on the table, filled a dipper from it, and gave his wife a drink. Weak and perspiring, she lay for an hour or more longer, while Joe sat silently smoking and watching her. Finally she could endure his survey no longer. She struggled to her feet and tottered over to a chair, into which she almost fell. She could not overcome the severe trembling which shook her. She glanced furtively at Joe. Since their marriage a year before he had never been actually brutal with her, but he had been on the verge of it times

enough to fill her with fear of him. She felt uneasy and apprehensive. Was he angry now with her because she had not borne her pain mutely as did other Indian women? Joe remained silent, staring at his feet. The cabin was in darkness except where the moonbeams fell through the window and directly across the bed, faintly lighting the smooth black head of the small, helpless, new-born child which lay there.

The light seemed to bother the baby, for it puckered up its tiny red face and moaned softly. This was the first sound the child had made. Mabel leaned far forward in her chair and looked at it wonderingly. She had forgotten the baby in her fear of Joe. The baby moaned again, and moved its head feebly on the rough, dirty blanket. A fineness that had until now been dormant in Mabel came to life and responded to the appeal of the child's complaint. Quite instinctively she answered the call of her young. She rose with a great effort, and stumbling weakly over to the bed, picked up the wee, cold, naked thing and held it to her breast. One little crumpled hand moved gropingly, and she took it gently into her own warm one. With that gesture there came to her the realization that the baby was her own, and she loved it deeply, savagely. Against all the hostile world she would fight for it. Even against the wrath of her husband and master she would defend this baby.

Turning her sunken brown eyes, fairly liquid-bright now with this new-born emotion of motherhood in them, upon her husband where he sat in the darkness, she said to him gently in the broken English they used

with each other, "I make for you a fine baby, Joe. You like her, eh?" She waited anxiously for his reply. A long time she listened strainingly, then came his quiet answer, "Yes, she's damn fine papoose. She's nice, strong baby. I call her Joe Pete for me and my brudder."

Not another word was spoken between them, but Mabel was completely satisfied, even happy. She carefully wrapped the child in a blanket and gently laid him in a basket near the bed. She sat on the floor beside the basket, patting the baby cautiously until he quieted. Then she and Joe lay down on their own bed, and soon Joe was heavily asleep. The baby turned his head restlessly from side to side and made odd little sounds. Mabel longed greatly to go over to the basket and hold him close and comfortingly in her arms. She wanted to feel the strange, exquisite softness of the little body again. But she was afraid of waking Joe. For a time she lay there, wide-eyed, miserable. She was weak and tired from her recent suffering, and in spite of her desire to have her baby in her arms, she fell asleep.

The moon drifted lower through the night, becoming redder every moment. The ray of moonlight shining through the window moved slantingly, like the dimmed spotlight of a stage, across the squalid, miserable room. It lighted for a few fleeting moments the littered corners, the broken chairs, an unfinished basket which had been interrupted in the making by the birth of Joe Pete, the old table, the bare box-cupboard; then slowly faded and was snapped out. A little dawn-wind came

betimes from the east, puffing through the clearing. The spruce trees suddenly broke into audible, whispering laughter. The new-born Joe Pete whimpered unheard in feeble, futile protest against being forced to enter this state we call Life.

II

MABEL

The year which followed the birth of Joe Pete was the happiest Mabel had ever known. Hers had been the usual uneventful life of the Indian children on the Island. Her parents had both died from small-pox when she was a small child. Her grandmother, called by the Islanders "Old Nokomis, the Herb Woman," had taken her then and had kept her until the time of her marriage to Joe Shingoos. They had often been hungry and cold, but old Nokomis had been unfailingly kind to her. When Mabel was big enough she helped out by working for a Frenchwoman in the Settlement. After Joe had taken her away he had refused to let her have anything more to do with the old lady. He gave no reason for his refusal, but Mabel knew that he was jealous of the affection she felt for her grandmother. Both women accepted the command stoically enough, and did not dare to disobey because of the inevitable beating which would follow. Nokomis was unbelievably aged, yet continued to live in her small hut beside the trail which led over the top of the steep hill above the Settlement. When Mabel passed the hut on her way to the store, she occasionally met her grandmother as she stumbled along with her basket of precious roots and

leaves. In times of illness the older Indians still sent for her, or else came to her, and were usually cured by her carefully brewed medicines.

In July, when the baby was about a month old, Joe left the Island and went up to the big town on the mainland to find work. A freighter, which was short handed, was locking up through to Lake Superior. Joe asked for a job and was told to climb aboard immediately. He "sailed" on the freighter all the rest of the year. Before he had left the Island he had told Mabel to go to the postoffice every month and get the money which he planned to send her. When he did not return she knew he must have obtained work, and at the end of the month went to get her money.

There was only one postoffice on the Island, and it was located in one end of the general store in the Settlement. The Settlement was a tiny village, made up of twenty or thirty French families, who lived in immaculate log houses and thriftily worked their rock-strewn, scanty farms. They were a merry, tolerant group, yet were rather scornful toward the Indians because of their uncleanly habits, and what they termed their general "cagnarderie."

Theophile Vargatte was the richest man in the village, and was both postmaster and storekeeper combined. He was a kindly Frenchman, and had kept this store in the Settlement for many years. He knew, and was tolerant toward, every one of the French and Indian population on the thirty-mile-long Island, and was liked and trusted even by the Indians. His wife, Delima,

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was an amiable, round little woman, who sputtered in French and English,—the two common languages of the village,—on the slightest provocation. But underneath all her sputtering she shared her husband's sincere tolerance for the mistakes of humanity. They both were as courteous to the dirty, disreputable squaw, Charlotte Shegahg, and as attentive to her wants, as they were to Madame De Longue, who was the wife of the most prosperous farmer on the Island. Mr. Vargatte had once lived in Detroit, so he knew well the ways of cities and life on the "outside," and was generous with shrewd advice to anyone who needed or wished it. So, on the last day of each month, when Mabel went for her money, Mr. Vargatte showed her where she was to make her mark in his postoffice book, and then handed her the registered envelope which Joe had sent. Sometimes there was as much as twenty dollars in it. This was luxury.

While Joe was away Mabel had time and freedom to enjoy her baby, and she grew to love him more every day. She made a crude hammock for him from a piece of gunny sacking and some discarded ropes, and hung it across one corner of the room near the window where the sunlight streamed through in long, mote-filled shafts. This hammock became the very center of her existence. Not that she fussed over her baby; she did not know how to express the great depth of her feeling for him. She constantly looked up from her weaving and smiled at him lying there so quietly asleep. When his big brown eyes opened and looked vaguely at the

sunlight pouring in through the window she spoke to him just to see him look at her, an odd little smile quirking up one corner of his mouth at the familiar sound of her voice. When she passed the hammock as she moved about her weaving or housework she sometimes patted his hands, and his uncertain, answering gestures pleased her mightily. It delighted her to believe that he knew she was his mother, for there were times when he looked directly at her as though he really recognized her, and tried to talk to her with mumbling little baby noises. At these times she could not restrain herself and gave way to her love for him; she picked him up in her arms and hugged him close to her breast, surprising even herself at her passion of feeling for this baby. Never in her life had anything so stirred her. But always when she had hugged the baby she felt ashamed, even a little frightened, and put him quickly down in his hammock again. Indian women did not hug their babies.

Her happiness found an outlet in her weaving. Never had she done such perfect work! Her strips of ash "timber" were thin and satin smooth; her colors were delicately subdued; and her baskets took on lovely shapes under her skillful fingers. She worked lovingly, slowly—deliberately weaving the subtle beauty of this happiness of hers into each basket. She had always had a reputation for her clever weaving. Women in the town usually bought her baskets when they would not even examine those carried by other Indian women. This summer she surpassed herself.

The problem of selling the baskets seemed unsolvable. The baby was too small to be left with anyone while she went up to town and was also too small to be taken with her on the long boat trip, which was usually made in a small, crowded launch. Neither could she carry him about while she went from house to house with her big load of baskets. She could not plan any way out of her dilemma until one day Mary Waubos came to see Joe Pete. Mary was an old childhood friend of Mabel's and lived about a mile farther on the old trail. Mabel felt free to talk the thing over with her, for though Mary's eyes were small and close-set, she was wise, and shrewd, and always had money in her pockets. They finally agreed that Mary would take Mabel's baskets up to town with her own, and after selling them would take a third of the money for her share. Joe had often suggested to Mabel that she take her baskets up to the dock where the big passenger boats landed with crowds of tourists. He had heard that tourists were eager to find Indian baskets and paid more for them than the townspeople did. She now passed this suggestion on to Mary, who said she was willing to try it once at least.

This was a new and very bold venture for both women, and the result exceeded their wildest expectations. Mary had two deep pockets sewed into her dress. In one pocket she put the money from her own baskets; in the other she put Mabel's money. In this simple way she kept their accounts straight. When the boat landed she was close to the edge of the dock with her

wares spread enticingly about her, and the moment the passengers were allowed to cross the gangplank she was surrounded by curious, exclaiming tourists. Never before had she seen women dressed in silk sports clothes. Their high, clicking heels amazed her, and she wondered how they were able to walk on them. She was fairly dazed with the voluble, careless chatter of them. They bought every basket she had brought, with shrill, staccato exclamations of "Beautiful!" "Exquisite!" "Such fine weaving!" and not one of them knew, or even surmised, that they were exquisite and beautiful because an Indian woman's first happiness was woven into them.

Two beautifully gowned women handled the baskets a long while before deciding upon those they wanted to buy. The younger woman asked Mary where she got her designs, and how she created such colorful art. Mary looked at her blankly, pondered a moment or two, then her left shoulder moved upward in that inimitable, untranslatable Indian shrug which expresses everything—or nothing—to certain beholders. What did a stolid Indian squaw know of such terms as "design" and "art"! The gesture seemed to annoy the woman. She turned to her older companion and said, deliberately speaking loud enough for Mary to hear, "Did you ever see a dirtier person? Look at those stubs of teeth. They are worn off level with her gums!"

Neither of the white women knew, and Mary could not explain to them—even had she cared to explain—that this was the double price paid by Indian women

for the lovely strips which were woven into their baskets. After the labor of felling the tree and the laborious pounding with heavy axe butts, those strips were split and separated to delicate thinness almost entirely with fingers and teeth. Worn teeth are the sign of the good basket weaver.

The gentler, white-haired woman said softly to the other, "Hush, dearie, hush! She may hear you," and bought four baskets, giving Mary more money than she had asked for them. She stared after the two women until they went around out of sight on the opposite deck.

When Mary returned to Mabel's cabin that night she had money in both pockets. She poured it out on the bed and they counted it jubilantly. It amounted to twelve dollars; seven for Mary and five for Mabel. A corner of the table was cleared of basket strips, and supper was hastily placed upon it. Mabel brewed some strong black tea and they both sat down to eat and rejoice excitedly over their unexpected success. After they had finished eating, Mary stood in the middle of the room and gave for Mabel's enjoyment an Indian imitation of the tourists buying her baskets, which was a fairly startling thing in its uncouth realism. With a few spare gestures, she made Mabel see the dock, the huge, luxurious boat, the tourists; even the conversation—though translated into Ojibway—was ridiculously like. The two women went into gales of laughter, and Mary was excited to further cleverness. Joe Pete woke at the noise, and smiled his funny baby smile at them, as if he too saw the joke of it. Mabel's interest



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immediately shifted to the baby. Mary realized that it was getting late and she must hurry home to her own children. Before she left they decided to take each load of baskets to the tourists' dock as long as the season lasted, and planned other shapes of baskets which would sell readily to these avid summer visitors.

Mabel was beautiful that summer. Eyes impenetrable in depth for all their clearness; skin like soft, leaf-brown satin; healthy, supple body; and a voice that fairly sang whenever she spoke to her papoose. When she went to the postoffice for her money those who passed her on the trail turned to look at her again, partly because her greeting to them rang out so joyously, and also because they had a feeling that they saw in her an ephemeral, fleeting perfection of beauty like that of the short-lived wondrousness of a northern summer.

After the last trip of the season the boats were laid up in winter quarters farther south and Joe came home. Mabel had dreaded his coming, but he surprised her by seeming glad to be with her again. He seemed to like Joe Pete too, and even smiled at his little tricks. Joe was not a smiling man, and Mabel was delighted at his good humor. All during that first day at home he sat in the cabin and watched her closely, and was soon aware of her love for the baby. But the day passed pleasantly enough and Mabel's fears vanished. Mary Waubos came in for a short time that night to talk and to give Mabel her share of basket money. The two women laughed happily and had much to discuss. They even dared to tell Joe that they had taken his advice

and had become prosperous. He smiled and Mabel was completely happy. Mary told funny incidents that had happened in the town, and Mabel enjoyed the telling of them as she never had before. Joe had never seen her so animated, so attractive, so desirable. He could not keep his eyes from following her graceful movements.

After Mary had gone Mabel put the drowsy baby in his basket, crooning an ancient Indian lullaby about the naked bear as she patted him to sleep. Joe sat watching, then finally went over to where she stood by the bed looking down at the sleeping Joe Pete, jerked her swiftly around to face him, and in spite of her scared amazement took her fiercely in his arms. In an unusual display of passion he kissed her lovely face and mouth with long, hard kisses, and held her close with an almost cruel embrace, muttering huskily, "By God, you fine woman now, Mabel. I like you, me!" This sort of outburst was not typical of the Indian. Never before had Joe given vent to anything but verbal abuse of Mabel. She was uncomfortable when he held her so, but it all convinced her that he would do nothing which would destroy her happiness.

Joe was home but a week or two when Jerry came to offer him a job in the woods for the winter. Jerry was the foreman of the biggest camp on the Island and used as many Indian lumberjacks as he could. If an Indian would work for anybody, he would work for Jerry. The camp needed more men and the wages were good. The land over which Jerry was cutting was close to their



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land and Joe could live at home. Jerry hardly expected Joe to assent to his proposal. He knew the Indian well enough to realize that one who has sailed all summer will seldom work during the winter, for he usually has some money left. Joe, however, agreed to start work the very next morning. Mabel would still have her days free for her baby! She sang at her weaving.

Joe Shingoos was decently kind to Mabel and Joe Pete that winter. Only a few times did he get beastly drunk and those nights the men persuaded him to remain in camp. Occasionally he brought another Indian from the camp home with him to spend the evening, and they sat smoking and talking by the fire, but usually he seemed to be satisfied with his wife for company. She began to realize that he did not like the baby as much as she had expected and did not like to see her hold Joe Pete in her arms a moment longer than was necessary. She learned not to linger over putting him to bed as she had loved to do. Time after time he watched restlessly while she cared for the child. As soon as she put him in his basket Joe came over to her before she had quite finished covering him. Always he turned her away from the baby to face him and held her close in his arms while he kissed her with those wild, strange kisses. Mabel never told any of the other women about this singular love-making of her husband.

That was a hard winter even for the north country. The Island was shut away from the world for weeks at a time. The mail could not get through. The snow became ever deeper. There were sunny days of bitter,

tingling cold ; there were gloomy days when the one window was covered with thick picture-layers of frost and the cabin room was dim and full of eerie shadows ; and there were days of howling blizzards which shook the door and rattled the window as if the evil spirits which came with them were determined to force an entrance into the cabin. Despite the somber, protesting spruce trees guarding it, the little hut was almost buried under the whirling, drifting burden of snow they carried.

There were days when Mabel and Joe Pete shivered in front of their roaring fire, though they were wrapped in blankets. But Joe continued kind ; the cupboard was never empty. What else mattered ?

Manitou is considered kind when He gives to certain favored mortals one single hour of unalloyed happiness. To Mabel Shingoos He gave a year of such hours.

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### III

## JOE SHINGOOS

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After the long, cold winter, spring lagged and was very late in coming. There were, even in March, bleak, biting winds and intensely cold days when it was hard for the Indians to believe that there was warmth anywhere in the world. But at last the sun grew strong enough to melt the snow, the sap began to rise in the maple trees, and the sugar season was on. There were many acres of maple woods on the Island and everybody made sugar. Whole families lived during that time in their sugar camps, and the sweet, heavy fragrance of boiling syrup hung low over the forest.

This was also the time of merrymaking for the Indians. Hundreds of years before white men came to America the ancestors of these Indians had come to this same island to make sugar. Friends and relatives assembled at the crude camps. The old women took charge of the cooking of the sugar; the children helped to feed the fires; and all day the younger men and women carried the sap, making a game of the hard work and taking turns pulling the heavily laden sleds. The woods came suddenly awake with the noise of their calls and merriment.

In the evening they all gathered around the huge iron

kettle where the sugar was "finished off" over a low fire. Women gossiped over their small affairs and laughed quietly with pleasure at being together again after the dreary winter, while they held sheets of golden birch bark near the fire to warm them to pliability, then bent them quickly and deftly into clean, new cossos to catch the sap. Children begged for bits of crystallized sugar from the edges of the pot. Men smoked quietly, talking occasionally about the work in the lumber camps.

Later in the evening ancient, half-forgotten tales and legends were haltingly re-told by the old, old men, who immediately became the center of the group. Their sonorous, beautiful words conjured a mystic enchantment into the silent scene. The flickering flames lighted the lean, dark, intent faces of the listening group. And despite their professed acceptance of another, newer faith, there was deep in the pagan soul of each listener a credulous, half-ashamed belief in these tales of their ancestors.

Mabel did not join any of the camps that spring. Her friends, the Big John family, invited her to their camp, but she refused. Her husband and the baby kept her busy in her own cabin, and she knew also that Joe did not want her to go and would be very ugly if she insisted. She tapped in Indian fashion all the sugar maples in the woods close to their clearing. This was a simple thing to do. She took her sharp hatchet and cut a chip out of one side of the tree, quite close to the ground. Under this she cut a gash and inserted in it the chip she had cut from above. Down along this

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chip the thin, crystal-clear sap dripped into the big clean cossos, which she had folded during the winter from squares of perfect birch bark which Joe had brought to her from the woods. As the cossos filled with sap, she gathered it in a large barrel and brought it to the cabin, and there boiled it down to sugar. She fastened Joe Pete on her back when she made her trips with the sled to gather the heavy load of sap. For weeks her clearing was one of many which were fragrant with the pleasant odor of boiling sap. She had made miniature cossos to contain the sugar, and when the sap finally stopped running she had almost thirty pounds of sugar put away in the unused cabin room. She planned to sell it to the tourists.

Joe refused to help her in the sugar making. He had suddenly quit his job in the camp. The only explanation he vouchsafed to Jerry was that he was tired. To Mabel he offered no reason at all. She watched him become more silent and surly each day. She could do nothing to please him and because of her helplessness her old fear of him returned, doublefold now, for there was the baby to be thought of. Joe still watched her when for any reason she took the child in her arms, but he had stopped coming to her for embraces. She tried to keep the baby out of Joe's sight as much as possible, for she now realized that he had come to hate the child with a jealous hatred. But Joe Pete was learning to walk! He seemed to be very proud of this achievement, and to her great dread was constantly underfoot. She watched her husband's big, heavily booted feet

anxiously when the baby wobbled toward him, for he often looked at the child as if he would like to kick him. She knew from her few early experiences with Joe what she might expect when he was in one of his ugly moods. She could bear to be beaten and kicked, for that was the ordinary, accepted fate of the average Indian wife; but her small, beloved Joe Pete could not. She became silent too for fear some word even might offend Joe. She also tried to keep away from the child and pretend that she did not so love him; but this was impossible. Every day the situation became more tense and Joe's dislike for the baby more evident.

Then came a night when Joe came home drunk. He ate the food that she had ready for him on the table, glancing at her occasionally with eyes that were yellow with hatefulness. After eating his supper he moved his chair nearer the fire and sat staring at the floor with his prominent teeth bared intermittently under his lifted upper lip like a grinning werewolf. Almost anything might happen if he were disturbed while he was in this state of beastliness. Mabel also sat, not daring to move and attract his attention to herself. Joe Pete lay on a blanket on the floor near the fire where he had fallen asleep earlier in the afternoon. She watched him anxiously and hoped he would stay asleep until Joe had gone to bed. But suddenly the baby woke and his lips curved in his faint, crooked smile as he looked around for his mother. In spite of the danger of his awakening at this inopportune moment she was thrilled to see how his eyes unerringly sought her out in the semi-



darkness of the room. Slowly and with repeated tumblings again to the floor, he got up on his small, unsteady feet and started toward her. His father was between. Joe Pete was not yet wise in the ways of fear. As he swayed past his father he put a soft hand on his knee for support. That one touch decided the direction of the lives of the three in the cabin. With a mad, evil oath Joe jumped to his feet. His eyes glared insanely, his powerful body poised, his big boot shot swiftly back; but before he could kick the baby, Mabel had wildly flung herself upon him, her whole weight hanging upon his uplifted foot, almost throwing him to the floor.

This unprecedented action brought amazement to both of them, and Joe came back to a bleak saneness. He grabbed her by both shoulders, pulled her brutally to her feet, and glared into her eyes, noticing that they had in them an expression he had never seen there before. For she stared back at him with a bigger thing than fear holding her steady and silent under his clutching, hurting fingers. And for the first time Joe actually realized that he had now no power over his wife; yet did not even now understand that it was because the emotion of motherhood was greater than her emotion of dread. Slowly the spasm of rage dimmed in his own eyes. They became human again, but shining cold. For many seconds he looked at her, gazed long and deeply at that queer light in her eyes which he could not comprehend, yet knew had caused this hatred he felt for her. He flung her viciously to the floor where she lay trembling, while every bit of her unwonted

bravery oozed out of her. According to Indian custom, since she had defied him, Joe had a right now to do anything he pleased to both of them. She lay shivering, wondering what was coming. If he would only speak she would try to explain. But Joe's lips were a tight line. The scared baby snuggled close to her side and lay quiet.

Joe resumed his seat in the rocker by the fire and sat for more than an hour brooding. Not a word was spoken. The baby fell asleep once more and Mabel lay motionless, fearing to awaken him again and precipitate another scene. Finally Joe stood, casually stretched his arms high above his head, and walked over to the bed. Her hopes rose high, but he reached under the bed and pulled out his shabby suitcase. In it he put the suit of clothes which he kept for town wear, his pipe, socks ; all the intimate things about the room which belonged to him he carefully collected and packed in the suitcase, then closed it with a loud snap and locked it. For the first time in the hour he looked at her, and the thin line of his lips twisted in a sneering, one-sided smile, then straightened again to its habitual, cruel cast. From the bed where he had thrown them when he entered, he took his cap and mackinaw and slowly donned them, carefully fastening every button instead of only the usual top and bottom buttons. He picked up the suitcase and moved leisurely over to the door. All this time she waited, not venturing even to look at him. At the door he turned toward her. "Noozhasim," he called her,



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then opened the door, stooped through it, and went out into the night.

For a long time she lay where he had flung her, half expecting him to return—half wanting him to return. Then she raised her head and looked dumbly about the empty room as though she could not believe that this thing had happened to her. The door creaked on its hinges as it swung to and fro. The cold night wind sifted in and stirred the folds of the little dress Joe Pete wore. She was suddenly conscious of the rustling of the spruce trees outside the door and there seemed to her to be mockery in the sound of them. Joe Pete sneezed, woke, and whimpered softly. Mabel closed the door. Wearily, like an old woman, she stooped and gathered the baby in her arms, crossed over to the rocker where Joe had sat but a short while ago, and dropped into it. There came upon her a realization of dreary sorrow and foreboding for the future, which even the sight of the baby could not dispel. Joe would never return to her. A man must be the center of the household and all things in it are for his comfort. No child, however dear and beloved, must ever be allowed to usurp that place.

With her head bowed low over the child held tight to her breast she began to sway back and forth in the rocker—swaying as grief-stricken women have done down through all the ages—and from her shaking lips suddenly broke the ancient Indian grief-wail, “Aih-ah, aih-ha, aih-ah—,” tonelessly—monotonously—endlessly.

IV

DAWAS

Mabel was now in a worse situation than had been hers before her baby was born. She had to work to supply her own needs and the baby was an added burden. He was yet too small to take to town and too heavy to carry while she tramped around the city selling her baskets. She grew thin and haggard with worry, deep lines appeared in her face, and her beauty quickly faded. It was then that she thought of her friends the Big Johns and went to them for help and council. After some discussion they solved the problem for her, as they solved problems for all the Indians on the Island.

Big John was a kind of head man or chief on the Island. His father had been a chief before him, and the Indians had formed a habit of asking his advice when they got into difficulties or needed help. His house was the largest Indian cabin—and the cleanest—on the Island, and squatted on the shore near the long dock in the Settlement. It was from this dock that Big John's launch started, which carried mail and passengers to and from the city three times each week; for he was the mail carrier that year.

Every year one of the Island Indians had a contract with the Government to "run the mail." If he were

using a launch to make the mail trip, by taking out a license he could also carry enough passengers to pay the expense of running the boat. The passengers had to reach the dock at a certain time or they were left behind, for the mail boat had to go through on schedule time regardless of wind and weather. In the winter they used horses or dogs across the ice, or even walked on snowshoes and carried the mail sacks if they could not get through the snow in any other way. Big John had a long record of always getting the mail through on time, and was proud of it. When he reached the city and walked down Main Street with the heavy mail sacks slung carelessly over his shoulder, tourists turned to look at him and begged for the privilege of "snapping" him. He was the ideally picturesque Indian of legend and picture.

Mrs. Big John was treated like a white woman by her husband, and because there was no meanness in him she loved him as few Indian women love their men. She had become so ponderously bulky in her middle age that she could not safely travel in any of the small launches used by the Islanders; so she was home all day, busy with her large family and her weaving. While she wove, her older daughters, Mary and Katie, did the housework. The girls never could weave so skillfully as their mother for they did not have her capacity for infinite patience, but they went to town with the finished baskets and sold them or shrewdly traded them to the townspeople for discarded clothes.

The Big John family all loved children. There were

eight in the family, but their home had been opened to many unfortunate waifs; and it was now offered to the little Joe Pete. Mrs. Big John told Mabel that Joe Pete would be company for her baby Jennie, for they were both the same age. Mabel knew they would be very good to him and gladly assented to their suggestion that she should leave the baby with Mrs. Big John when she had to go to town. So every second Saturday she tied her nested bundles of fragrant baskets in an old sheet, slung it over her shoulders, knotted the corners of the sheet across her chest, picked her baby up in her arms, and followed the trail which led out of her clearing and down the long hill to Big John's cabin. There she left Joe Pete for the day and in the evening carried him home again.

Always on the way to and from Big John's she let the baby walk as much as he would and smiled at his rapid progress. Each week he wished to walk farther, and toward the end of the summer he was walking the entire distance and would not let her carry him. Mrs. Big John became very fond of him, and he loved her and all the brood of Big John children. He learned from them to speak the pure Indian instead of the broken English which his mother preferred to use.

Many Indian women went up to town on the mail boat to sell their baskets, but not all of them returned the same day. They sold their baskets easily enough on the days when the passenger boats landed and the town was full of tourists. But on other days they had to sell their wares to townspeople who already had too many

baskets. Many of the squaws tramped the streets, their feet wearied from the unaccustomed cement walks, until late at night. They had no food unless some kindly housewife took pity on them and gave them a lunch to eat while they sat and rested on the back steps. There was no respectable place for them to stay at night. Only a few of them had friends in town who could give them shelter. But just beyond the city limits there was a tall, unpainted, many-roomed building with shutters on the windows. It was kept by a filthy, repulsive old man. He gave shelter to the squaws who had no friends and were belated, and they in turn paid him for their shelter by satisfying the desires of the men who came at intervals all during the night to the big, gaunt house.

Mabel had heard about this place many times from Mary and other Indian women. They were all fearful of it. They told of many very dreadful things that had happened to squaws in that house. Mabel was certain, however, that she would never have to spend a night there and refused to worry. She was as unmoral as any other Indian woman, but she preferred to sell her body, if she had to, to one of her own race whom she understood, rather than to a white man who was as brutal as the women said. She was so sure about always selling her baskets that she rather bragged to the other, older squaws, who only shook their heads, or maintained a stolid silence. They were more experienced in life and had learned that whatever was to happen to anyone would happen when the time came.

One had to take the evil as well as the good and make no fuss over it.

There was one Saturday late in August when Mabel went to town with her baskets and they did not sell. Bad luck followed her all that day. Two of her regular customers, who had always bought baskets of her to send to friends in other cities, were out of town. Others refused to buy, after wasting much of her time looking at the baskets; while others would not look at them at all. At four o'clock, the time the mail boat must leave for the Island, she was in the opposite end of the city and still had more than half of her baskets unsold. She must sell the rest of them to buy food for herself and Joe Pete.

It was after nine in the evening when she sold the last basket—for half of what it was worth. She was weary and hungry, and for the first time that day realized that there was not a place open to her. She wandered about, looking in store windows without seeing what was displayed there, wondering numbly what she would do and where she might go, for the night was very cold. She dared not ask shelter from anyone she met on the streets, for she knew from her experiences in selling her baskets that the whites were afraid of Indian diseases. The city jail was open to her, but she did not know this. She had not a friend in town. Policemen eyed her suspiciously and told her to "move on." She had been taught to hold the Law in dread, and did not dare to tell them her predicament. She moved on and on again, over and over, at their repeated commands,

until her legs were so weary they would not move any longer. All the time she was wandering the thought of the house came into her mind persistently and her fear of it grew. She became chilled through and her limbs felt leaden. She grew faint and shook uncontrollably. And then under the discomfort of it all her will broke. Like those other weary, frozen, suddenly desperate squaws, who must have rest and shelter, she turned down the street which led straight to the big, unpainted house.

For a long time she stood in front of it and gazed at the shuttered windows. Even now she was undecided. After much hesitation she slowly mounted the steps and knocked timidly. A dim light snapped on in the hall and the old man opened the door. He whispered something to her and she nodded. The door opened wider. Without a word she entered and he took her upstairs to a small, unaired room. She sat huddled and frightened beside the too-narrow window. The first man who came to her room was a drunken brute. The second was worse. In spite of her weariness her terror kept her awake.

In the early morning she left the house. She felt that no experience which came to her in the future could be any more terrible than this. A bitter sense of unfairness filled her as she walked the streets that day. Her head was bent for the first time, and her thoughts were morbid and ugly. She knew now that there was neither place nor thought for the Indian, just as the older, wiser ones of her tribe had said. The whites took

and took until there was nothing left to take from the Indian, and gave nothing but misery in return.

In the afternoon she had a chance to ride down to the Island with Mr. Vargatte, who had come up to town for a load of groceries. When she went to Big John's cabin to get Joe Pete, kind Mrs. Big John looked at her intently. She asked no questions, for even as she looked at Mabel she knew what had happened. Mabel's eyes had always been clear and frankly open, with a certain level gaze not usual in the squaw. Now she saw they had changed somehow, as though a light in them had been extinguished. They were dull and held something that had never been there before: a bitter hardness, as though she had finally realized that because she was a squaw she was perforce fighting a losing battle with life, but was determined not to go down unavenged. She held Joe Pete close to her for a minute or two as if she could never bear to let him go again. He was glad to see her, and her eyes softened momentarily as she looked into his smiling face. Then she put him down abruptly on the ground and started up the trail toward home. The baby slowly and proudly followed as best he could, but his mother never looked back at him. Not once did he whimper, even when she went too fast for his stumbling feet to keep up.

In September the leaves turned to scarlet and gold, and by the end of October had fallen. The old Indians were predicting a good winter, one not so cold as Joe Pete's first winter. The camps had moved from the Island to the Dogomain mainland to finish a winter's

cut of timber, and many Indians from the Island had gone there to work for Jerry. Dawas was one of these. He was a lean, tall, kindly Indian, who worked in the camps during the winter and towed pulp logs with his ancient power boat in the summer. He had no home, but had built a small cabin on the boat, which he called the "Arrow," and lived in it during the warm months.

Dawas was not like the other Indians on the Island. He was of the Ottawa tribe and had a queer streak. There were times when he would suddenly disappear and be gone for two or three years, appearing again without any explanation either as to the cause of his going or where he had been. But from the tales he sometimes told around the fire after the work of the day was finished, the Indians concluded that these trips took him far up into northern Canada, into a country unknown to them. In this one respect he was unreliable, and he was also a dreamer; but he was a splendid workman and was always warmly welcomed in any lumber camp. He was an asset to a camp foreman, for he knew all the Indians who would work and where they could be located. Though he spoke fair English and very good French, to an Indian he refused to speak in any other than the Indian tongue.

Almost as soon as Dawas arrived in camp, Jerry asked him if he knew of any Indian woman who could cook. He wanted two immediately, for his temporary cook was leaving the following week. Dawas thought over all the women on the Island. He had always liked Mabel. She could cook too, for she had once worked

for a French woman in the Settlement and had learned the ways of the whites about their houses. The Big Johns had spoken to him many times lately about her and had seemed somewhat worried over her. Now that Joe Shingoos had left her she was free to do as she pleased. Dawas suggested her to Jerry, and Jerry asked him to go and get her if he could.

Mabel was cutting wood when Dawas entered her clearing and came up to her. The baby was picking up little sticks. Dawas laughed at his efforts to fill his short arms with them as he had seen his mother doing. Joe Pete looked up at him and smiled his engaging smile. Dawas was pleased at his friendliness. Stooping low he picked up the baby and tossed him high into the air with easy strength. Mabel called to him warningly, "She bite you, Dawas, if you touch her!" But Joe Pete did not bite. He laughed aloud instead, one of his rare laughs in his enjoyment of this new sensation. Mabel looked at them and smiled in spite of her dreariness. This was such a good, kindly Dawas! When he was made, all the man-cruelty was left out. She had always liked him. If he had not gone off on one of his incomprehensible wandering trips just at the time when the old Nokomis thought it right that she should marry, he might have been the father of Joe Pete. He was ten years older than she, but he seemed younger. She was really glad to see him again. When he had set the baby once more on his feet she asked him to come into the cabin.

While she brewed strong tea and placed some bread

and syrup on the table, Dawas proposed that she might live with him, now that her husband did not want her any longer. He did not suggest marriage, nor did she think of resenting the omission. When an Indian tires of one woman he leaves her for another. Marriage had not held her husband Joe, neither would it hold Dawas if he should weary of her. So what was the use of it?

He told her about the snug, warm camp on the Dogomain, the heavy blankets, the good food, and the wages she would earn by her cooking. When spring came again she would have much money. There would be many men to cook for, of course, but most of them would be Indians, and she would know what they liked best to eat. In fact, that was the reason Jerry wanted an Indian woman.

Jerry had given Dawas permission to get someone to help Mabel, and he thought he could get old Jane Poker and her daughter Sara to help wash dishes and do other work. Sara was not strong just now, but she could help a little until her baby came. Mabel knew about Sara. The white man, who had virtually bought her when she was but a child from heartless old Jane, had taken her far back into the thick woods and had kept her there on his timber claim where she had seen nobody for four years. All the Indians suspected that Wilson abused her. Now he had tired of her and had driven her out of his cabin to fend for herself. He did not want any crying babies about his place even if they were his own. He had never married her; so she had no claim on him.

Having no other place to go, the child was forced to come back to her mother. Dawas was sure that Sara had the "lung sickness." Mabel had always liked Sara and knew that the child returned her affection. The prospect of such solid comfort as Dawas had pictured through a hard northern winter was very alluring. Joe Pete would be warm and well fed. Dawas would be kind to her and good to the baby. She told him to go to old Jane's cabin and see if Jane would come, then return, and she would tell him if she would go.

In the late afternoon Dawas returned. Mabel was waiting at the door watching for him. As he came near she noticed that he looked for the baby.

"What did they say, Dawas?" she asked.

"They will come," he said. "They were getting ready when I left and will meet us at the dock. You are now coming?"

"Yes," she answered. "I will come with you."

He patted her on the shoulder awkwardly. For the first time since she had left the cabin of the old Nokomis, she felt safe.

It did not take them long to get ready to leave the cabin. There was nothing in it of value that anyone would want. She tied her few clothes in a blanket. They closed the door of the house tightly, to keep out the weather, and nailed a long board across it so the Islanders would know she was not at home. Another board they nailed over the window so it would not get broken. Then she and Dawas, each holding one of Joe Pete's hands, went down to the big dock in the Settlement where the "Arrow" was tied.

V

S A R A

The prophecies of the old Indians about the winter did not come true. It was again very cold, the ideal logging weather. The continuous warning calls of the men shouting "Timber!" as the huge, feathery hemlocks fell to earth with a loud crashing of branches and flying snow sounded in the woods and were carried echoing on the crisp air even to the cook camp where Mabel worked, helped by old Jane Poker and her daughter Sara. The fare at the camp was good, for Mabel reveled in having so much to do with, and the food was well cooked. Old Jane washed dishes and set the long tables for the next meal. Sara peeled potatoes or did cheerfully any other task required of her.

Between the child Sara and Mabel a warm friendship had grown. Mabel was kind to her, and it was almost the only kindness the sick girl had ever known. After her hateful life with Wilson, the camp and Mabel's goodness seemed like a dream come true. To repay Mabel she devoted herself in her spare moments to the care of Joe Pete. She loved him dearly, perhaps because of the baby which was coming to her, which she felt she would not live to hold in her arms. She was terribly afraid of the coming of this baby,

though she wanted it. With that brutal frankness so typical of the Indian, her mother had told her that unless she became stronger she would probably die when her baby was born. She dreaded the thought of death. Life had not been kind to her, but she was young and had the hopefulness of youth. She did not want to die and leave her baby with her mother. Mabel tried to reassure her and partly succeeded in allaying her fears.

But even with Death waiting just beyond a narrow space of time, the camp was a pleasant place. The men were kind to Joe Pete and in fact would have spoiled him if he had been more dependent. There was more to eat than Mabel or the other women had ever seen at one time, and the camp was as snug and warm as Dawas had promised. He was good to her too. He was working as chore boy, and was able to help her and make her work easier. He kept the water pails filled to the brim. The piles of wood drying behind the cook stove were never allowed to drop below a certain height. Best of all, he kept the fire going in the cook camp all night. He woke the women early in the morning when he went out to feed the horses. It was a wonderful experience for these Indian women to be able to dress in a warm room.

The camp was well arranged and comfortable even in the coldest weather. One end of the big room was partitioned from the rest of the interior, and then divided again with thick curtains into two smaller rooms. In each small room were two hay-filled bunks with

many blankets. Mabel and Dawas had one of these rooms, and old Jane and Sara had the other. This privacy was an almost unheard of luxury to the squaws.

To make room for Joe Pete, Dawas built from a big packing box a small bed for him which took up little space. It could be pushed under the bunk during the day and pulled out at night when it was needed. It was half filled with hay and when the warm blankets were spread over it, it was a comfortable bed. He had become as fond of Joe Pete as if he had been his own child. In the evening after the supper work was finished and he had seated himself by the stove, Joe Pete always came over to him and put up his arms to be taken. Dawas never refused him. While he held him gently he told him all the tales that his own father had told him when he was a child, talking to the baby as though he were a child of six or seven, instead of one who would not be two years old until June. Sara sat as close to them as she could and listened wide-eyed. Joe Pete enjoyed it all. He sat staring at Dawas with his big solemn eyes until he could no longer hold them open. Then Dawas quietly called Mabel, and she always left her weaving and put the baby in his little box bed, while Dawas watched them both with evident pleasure.

Jerry slept in the office. He was a big, easy-going man who, from long experience with Indians, understood how to get along with them, at the same time demanding a fair amount of work. There was very little friction in Jerry's camps and none that was

not easily smoothed out again. He felt that Dawas had "taken him in" about Sara, but knowing how they felt about her he held no resentment toward either of them. He would rather not have had Sara there in such a condition, but he would not turn her out. She was at least earning what she ate, and he was sure she would not live long. He would even have been glad to have a doctor for her, but that was impossible. They were miles from a city and the roads were utterly impassable. He hoped she would not have to suffer long and that he might not have to watch that suffering.

Time passed quickly. The work was monotonous but everything moved smoothly, according to Jerry's schedule. During January swift, sudden storms piled the snow up as high as the windows in the eaves of the cook camp, and the men had to stop cutting. When February came the snow began to melt rapidly. During that month the logs were hauled down to the shore and piled ready for the loading on the lumber hookers as soon as the ice went out of the river. Jerry had to go to another camp, and from there to town on business toward the end of the month. Before he departed, Dawas asked him to go into the cook camp to see Sara, who was very ill. For some weeks now she had felt miserable, and Dawas had a presentiment that she would not be there when Jerry returned to the camp. Sara was sitting by the fire with her head resting in her hands when Jerry went in. He could see that she was ill indeed. Her eyes were heavy and filmed, her cheeks were flushed. Her body was pitifully thin. It

seemed to Jerry that she had changed over night. He swallowed a lump in his throat and forced himself to speak cheerfully to her.

"How do you feel, Sara?"

"No good, no good," she answered dully.

He was accustomed to the sight of sudden death in the woods, but his eyes blurred at the sight of this uncomplaining child of fifteen sitting there quietly, patiently, enduring pain with all the stoicism of her race. He attempted to comfort her.

"Shall I bring you some red beads from the store when I come back from town? Would you like them, Sara?"

"Yes, yes!" she said, and a pleased, little-girl smile flashed for an instant across her face.

"The very reddest, prettiest beads I can find," he promised. He touched her hot cheek gently, shook his head sadly and went out. "Be good to her, Mabel," he said. "Give her anything she wants that we have or can get for her. I can't help any here, and I've got to go this week." Mabel promised. Jerry said good-bye and left, leaving Dawas in charge while he was away. He was glad that he had to take his trip just at this time. The Indians could endure the sight of the child's suffering better than he, and there was not one thing that he might do to make things easier for her.

Sara grew worse in the afternoon. The pains were bad, and between the recurrences of pain her body was racked by spasms of coughing. She had conceived such an aversion to her mother that she could not bear to

have her come near her or touch her. Later she became delirious. Over and over again she muttered to Mabel, "She made me go with him. I was afraid, but she made me go. Into the deep, black woods I went, and I was afraid—I was afraid." Mabel began to hate old Jane, who went on unconcernedly about her work.

In the evening Sara burned with fever and was violent. It took all Dawas' gentle strength to hold her in bed. The cruelty the child had suffered at the hands of Wilson in the "deep woods" and had never revealed even to Mabel was now made clear in her delirium. The men could not eat their supper. They left the meal untouched and went to the sleeping camp, full of resentment for Sara's ill treatment.

She called constantly for water, but could not drink it when they held it to her lips. She cringed away from Dawas with thin arms stretched out to protect her face and begged him not to beat her. Over and over until Dawas was sick came her pleading not to be whipped. The whip lash cut so deeply! She could not bear the sting of it across her arms! She had done nothing evil! She would do anything her man wished if only he would not beat her! She screamed in agony, mental now as well as physical. She reproached her mother. She became blind and was wildly afraid of the dark. Then she fought for her breath, and Dawas opened the door that the cold night breeze might help her. He had done all he could to relieve her. Great drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead. She was suddenly quiet, and he turned to look at her. Mabel came close to the

side of the bunk and held the child's hand. And even as they watched, a merciful Death came in over the threshold of the cook camp with noiseless feet and took away from little Sara Wilson her over-heavy load of sorrow and suffering. Dawas covered her with the blanket.

Mabel was shaking with excitement and hysterical fear. She felt a terrible hatred toward the white man who had so hurt Sara. It was all too much to bear. She threw herself down on her bunk and wept. She had loved Sara and had been made ill by her agony. She remembered her own agony when Joe Pete was born. She was expecting her next baby in July and was afraid now beyond any fear she had ever experienced. Dawas came in and sat down beside her. He said nothing, but his strong hand reached out and held hers. She quieted and still clinging to his hand fell asleep. Old Jane sat in the cook room. She filled her pipe stealthily from Dawas' sack of tobacco which lay forgotten on the table beside her and smoked undisturbed.

The next day the men made a box from new boards left from the camp building and dug a grave in the woods beside a huge, glacial boulder where the snow was not so deep. They wrapped Sara in an unused blanket and placed her gently in the clean, sweet-smelling box. One of the men repeated a prayer he had learned somewhere. Dawas made a small wooden cross which he placed at the foot of the grave. He had cut on it in deep, crude letters the name S-A-R-A. When Jerry returned the next week he hung his gift of red

beads over the cross and against the white snow they looked like a chain made of drops of blood.

The camp was abandoned in May. The cutting was finished and the logs were loaded. Jerry's firm owned nothing more on the Dogomain and would be cutting again on the Island the next winter. Jerry paid the men off, and one by one they packed their clothes and disappeared. Mabel had earned two hundred dollars; Jerry told her to give it to Mr. Vargatte to keep for her when she went back to her cabin. The storekeeper had long been a friend of Jerry's and the foreman knew him to be a scrupulously honest man. He also knew that two hundred dollars, if carefully used, would keep Mabel and Joe Pète for more than a year.

Dawas had the "Arrow" in readiness for the return trip home. He had spent a week getting her in shape. When the day came that they were to leave, Mabel was surprised to feel a sort of affection for the camp, and again came the feeling to her that things were always coming to an end. But when they reached the dock in the Settlement on the Island again, she was instantly eager to be at her own cabin. They stopped in the Settlement for a few hours. Mabel visited the Big Johns and showed them her roll of bills. They marveled and rejoiced with her. Then she went over to the store and gave the money to Mr. Vargatte, as Jerry had advised her to do. While she was making her mark on a piece of paper, the Vargatte baby came to the door which connected the living rooms with the

store, and stood there, staring intently at Joe Pete, who stared as intently back. They were both oblivious of any grown-ups—they saw only each other. Mr. Vargatte was much amused and said to Mabel, "What is the name of your boy?"

"Her name is Joe Pete," she answered, and smiled with pleasure at his interest.

"Our baby's name is Armand," he said again, "and they two look at each other as if they would wish to be friends."

She smiled again, but did not answer. He gave Joe Pete a stick of red striped candy and laughed outright at the sudden flashing smile which flitted across the baby's face. Mabel bought what groceries they needed. Then she called to Joe Pete and he followed her out. Dawas rose from the stoop in front of the store where he had been sitting and joined them. He looked at Mabel and there was an unspoken question in his eyes. She nodded. Together they took the old trail through the Settlement, passed the log schoolhouse, and climbed up the long hill toward the center of the Island where Mabel's cabin was. Joe Pete did not look back. But Armand went out on the stoop and watched Joe Pete until he vanished up the hill and so out of sight. Mr. Vargatte called his wife to come and look. They both laughed, and Mrs. Vargatte threw her arms around Armand fondly. Armand was always doing these "so funny" things.

VI

FRANK

In two or three hours Mabel and Dawas were settled in her cabin, and in that short time it took on the appearance of being lived in once more, of having never been vacant even for a winter. Mabel was delighted to be home again.

Dawas did many things to the cabin to make it more habitable. He mended the windows and the door and oiled the hinges to stop their creaking. He white-washed the cabin both outside and inside, making it spotlessly clean. He chinked up the holes between the logs in the walls of the second, smaller room. He built a high box-platform over the well, so Joe Pete would not fall into it. The cabin had never been so well cared for, so comfortable. In a few days it seemed to Mabel that she had not been away from it at all except for the fact that she could not rid her mind of the memory of Sara.

When the Islanders discovered that she had returned, they came in to visit as they passed on the trail through her clearing, and life went on as though she and Dawas had always lived there together. Dawas' presence excited no comment among the Indians. Such temporary arrangements were common occurrences in a squaw's

life. The social situation on the Island was unbelievably primitive. Any man was welcome who would help even a little in supporting the children, if he were not too brutal. And in many instances brutality was meekly borne for unexplained reasons. Children were accepted casually, with more of tolerance than love in the feeling held toward them, though many of the squaws had a deep love for their babies.

Mabel's second baby was born in July. Dawas was building a floor in the cabin, and had taken the "Arrow" to the city on a two-day trip for more boards and some provisions that could not be obtained at the Island store. So she was alone at the time the child was born. As soon as she recovered her strength she cared for him as well as she knew how, while two-year-old Joe Pete stood shyly beside her and watched her wonderingly.

It was a beautiful baby and had hands that were delicate and slim like those of the old pure-bred Indians. Mabel could not help admiring the perfect little body, but she did not have that love come to her for this child that she had experienced so instantaneously for Joe Pete. She was gentle with him, however. She wrapped him carefully enough in a warm blanket, though she really did not care particularly what happened to him.

When Dawas came home the next day, she did not mention the baby to him until he asked her if it had been born. Then she picked up the bundle which was the baby and laid it on the table in front of him. Dawas unfastened the blanket and touched the tiny

body cautiously. He was amazed at the smallness of it. The baby began to cry, and Dawas wrapped him in the blanket again; he looked up at Mabel and found her watching him intently. He suddenly felt queer, too; that tiny body had touched him more than he cared to admit. To hide his confusion he said hastily, "This papoose is a very small one."

She nodded.

"I did not know they were so small—so soft," he said.

Again she nodded.

"What are you going to name him?"

She shook her head, "I do not know."

He looked at the red face of the crying mite and pondered her answer.

"You do not like this baby, Mabel?"

She thought about it seriously for a few moments; then "No, no," she replied.

"Why?" he asked curiously.

For answer she shrugged her shoulders, and he, because he was an Indian, understood. "Frank is a good name," he suggested.

"Yes," she agreed, and with such scant ceremony Frank was named.

From his first glimpse of the baby Joe Pete loved him, as one small child usually loves another. When Frank cried he hastened over to the box where he lay and patted the small hands. At his touch the baby always stopped crying. Mabel paid little attention when the baby wailed. She fed him, then put him

again in his bed, and went on indifferently with her weaving and let him fret. But the sound began to wear on Dawas, for he was more nervous and finer in temperament than she. He developed a habit of leaving the house on every possible excuse and stayed away for whole days at a time. He spent hours on the "Arrow," just sitting there, listless and moping. The other men found him moody and gave up trying to talk with him. Later he became very restless, pacing up and down the floor while he was in the cabin, indifferent to most of what went on around him.

Mabel did not realize what was happening to them until one night in early September. Big John had come over with some interesting news. A party of five men from southern Michigan had bought sixty acres of cut-over land from the firm that Jerry worked for, and were going to erect a large hunting camp there in the next two months. Expert axemen were needed to build the main lodge, which the men wanted to complete in time for the hunting season in November, if possible. It was to be constructed of unpeeled logs, and a large crew of men could put it up quickly. Jerry was to have charge of the building operations and had asked Big John to tell Dawas that he would like to have his help. The building was to stand on the edge of the cutting and this adjoined Mabel's land.

Dawas was a deft axeman and was proud of his craft. He could hew to a line as smoothly and cleanly as though the work had been done with saw and plane. Not another man on the Island could equal him in

skill. Yet he let Big John talk on and evinced not the slightest interest. When he did not seem to hear a direct question put to him by Big John, Mabel dropped her work and looked at him, much perturbed. Usually Dawas was courteous even to his enemies. He would never offend a friend.

Big John stopped talking and the three sat in silence, broken only by the crying of the new baby. Dawas had not appeared to notice that the others had stopped talking, but he did hear the crying of the baby, for he suddenly got up and left the cabin. He offered not a word of excuse to Big John for his going. Big John looked at Mabel and knew that the same thought had come to both of them. It was he who voiced that thought, "Dawas have a spell again."

She agreed, "Yes."

"She will be going far away to the north Canada, that feller," Big John predicted.

She looked at him with misery frankly disclosed in her eyes. With Big John one did not have to be stoical. He felt instantly sorry for her.

"Maybe so she stay with you, Mabel," he consoled her, but they both knew that when the "spell" came upon Dawas no woman on earth could hold him. She had taken this risk when she had chosen Dawas. She knew she could not hold him. Nothing ever had kept him. Once more she must take up her life alone. In her mind she gallantly faced the situation at once. If it must come to her she would not mourn his going.

The outlook was not entirely hopeless. She had almost a hundred dollars left of her winter's earnings at the camp, even after buying some clothes for herself and Dawas and paying for the new boards. Her weaving would help. Mary would sell the baskets as she had done before. If nothing could keep Dawas, if she did not bewail the fact and make him too uncomfortable, it might happen that after some years of wandering he would come back to her again.

Big John waited until he was weary, but Dawas did not return. Before Big John left he went over to the bed where Joe Pete was sleeping and touched his cheek gently with the tips of his long, lean fingers. Joe Pete was very dear to this big, soft-hearted Indian. Mabel brought Frank over nearer the lamp so Big John could see him, too. He took Frank in his arms and looked at him closely. The baby was now more than two months old. His tiny face had more perfect features than Joe Pete's. His brown eyes were wide open, and she noticed after a time that it was the eyes which Big John was observing intently. He brought Frank close to the light and looked at his eyes again, while passing his hand directly in front of them. They remained wide open, never blinking. Big John pulled his huge, shiny watch out of his pocket and swayed it slowly in front of the baby, but the eyes did not follow the movement of it. After a while he gave the child back to Mabel and started toward the door. She stopped him with a swift hand upon his arm.

"Tell me, Big John!"

He turned toward her and said softly, "She's pretty baby, that Frank—but she don't see!"

Then he went out.

Mabel took the baby to the light and tried in every way to attract his attention to the bright objects she put before him. It was useless. The baby yawned; rubbed his sightless eyes with loose, petal-soft fists; closed them and fell asleep. Mabel had thought she did not care for him—now she was sure she did not. If this blindness had been the lot of Joe Pete she felt she could not have borne it, but she held Frank in her arms and was not disturbed at the calamity which had come upon him. She did not feel pity for his helplessness. When Dawas returned that night, she told him about it. He did not seem to hear.

October came—the most beautiful month of the northern year. The falling leaves made a vari-colored, patch-work covering over all the Island, and a faint, dead perfume rose from their slow decay. A haze, as of thin wood-smoke, blurred the days. Dawas sniffed it through dilated nostrils, and the North called him. The wandering spell had grown too strong, and he could no longer resist it. He did not know why he must go—he only knew that his going was imperative. The hunting camp was growing without his help. Nothing interested him.

Finally he told Mabel that he was going away, and could not answer when she asked "Where?" He did not know where, nor whether he would ever come back

again. He could only try to explain to her that something pulled him irresistibly and he had to go. He liked Mabel, he was fond of Frank, he loved Joe Pete; but even these three-fold strands woven into his new life could not hold him against that older, stronger, invisible one which drew him away from these he cared for most.

When Mabel saw he must go, she gave in. She helped him put his clothes in his pack; adjusted the length of the strap to the width of his shoulders; shut her lips in a straight, tight line that would allow no complaint to seep through; and let him go. Joe Pete clung to him as if he sensed that he would not see Dawas' long, lean form ever again. He pressed close to his mother's side for comfort.

As Mabel and Dawas stood in the doorway, knowing it was to be a long farewell, yet unable to say a word to each other, Dawas suddenly turned to her and pressed his mouth to hers. Then he swiftly turned to the trail. Mabel did not watch him cross the clearing; did not see him turn and wave a last good-bye as he entered the woods; did not know when the whispering spruce trees shut him from her sight. She had intended to watch him go—sitting on the floor near the window so he could not see her—and had found that her courage was not great enough for that. She had really loved Dawas. She pressed her head hard against the rough board window sill and wondered why she wept.

VII

THE HUNTING CAMP

The work of constructing the hunting camp progressed as rapidly as Jerry could drive his Indian workers. Only Jerry, with his complete understanding and tolerance of their ways, could have had the camp finished in the time that was set. By the first day in November the main lodge stood ready for occupancy. It was a solid, beautiful building, a marvel of woodcraft. Jerry was satisfied that the men from the lower peninsula would be delighted with the appearance of it.

By the end of the month of October the hardwood trees around her clearing were bare of leaves, and from her cabin door Mabel could see the roof of the new camp, glistening with white frost in the early mornings. Every night, after the working Indians left, she went over and gathered the smaller pieces of wood and boards. She was not feeling well, and the work of chopping wood for her fire was too great an effort for her. She did not know just what was the matter with her, but she knew that it was just as much a trouble of the mind as illness of body. After Dawas had left her a queer lassitude had settled upon her, as though something vital had gone out of her. She felt weak

and shaky; she had some fever; and if it had not been for Joe Pete she would have been content simply to lie upon her bed and wait for death. She had felt lately that the Trail of Life upon which Manitou had placed her at birth was too hard a path; she was weary of it; but her love for the child drove her on to whatever endeavor she made to provide food and fire.

Knowing now that she must depend entirely upon her own efforts, she forced herself to her basket-weaving, in order to have a load ready for Mary Waubos to take to town. She wondered how she could ever have taken pleasure in the work. It was now tiresome and monotonous. Her fingers seemed stiff, and numbed quickly. The amount of work she was able to do each day grew less and less, and was crude and clumsy. No longer did Mary get more for Mabel's baskets than she did for her own. Each time she returned from town she brought Mabel very little in cash or bartered clothes, and she was forced to draw heavily on the wages she had left with Mr. Vargatte.

The new baby lay and wept, uncomforted except by Joe Pete, who tried to talk with him, and patted the tiny hands while he looked inquiringly at his mother as if wondering why she did not do something about it. At times he came to her, pulled her skirt, and tried to lead her over to the baby. It touched her in spite of herself, but nothing moved her for long. She smiled at him when she caught him looking at her. She fed the baby when she thought about it and then left him alone to sleep or weep as he chose. She sat most of the time

in a dull daze of apathy, and did not care what might happen to them. Though she knew that unexpected noises bothered the baby, she took no pains to be quiet in her movements. Even when Jerry had the men gather a large load of wood from the camp refuse and sent it to her, she was not stirred enough to thank him for his kindness. She liked Jerry and had a great respect for him, but she would not answer his interested questions about her plans for the future.

One night Mary returned from town with a red silk dress which a woman had given her in exchange for a basket. Mary knew it was too small for herself, but she had brought it over for Mabel, of whom she was really very fond. Over and over she had tried to interest her again in their usual small happenings, but without success. She believed that this dress would make Mabel feel differently for she loved color. Mary unrolled it from the other things she had in her bundle, and with a rather dramatic gesture which was typical of her, held it up against her shoulders to show it off to Mabel. It was the prettiest dress that either of them had ever touched with her own hands. The color of it was like the soft scarlet of an October leaf. Mabel showed a faint interest in it, and after much urging by Mary was persuaded to put it on.

As Mabel pulled and patted it into place, it was as though she had donned beauty with the dress. She was suddenly lovely once more. The color of it brought out the satin gleam of her brown flesh and emphasized her long slenderness. It imparted to her an effect of

rather exotic but refined splendor. Mary was delighted, and left the gay dress with her. But after she had gone Mabel's excitement vanished again, and the little glow faded. She removed the dress sullenly, rolled it in a tight ball, and threw it under the bed. Dawas was gone—no one cared how she looked now, nor what happened to her. Why should she delight in the red silk dress or care how she looked? The apathy of loneliness returned heavily upon her. Her days went by without eventfulness or interest, but her health began to improve.

A week before the opening of the deer season the five men who were in partnership in the hunting camp came from the southern peninsula to get it ready. They were all comparatively men of wealth, and they needed many comforts to help them "rough it" in the woods. They brought two wagon-loads of their necessities with them—dishes, furniture, and blankets. Mr. Vargatte brought the things out and also a load of provisions. A light snow had fallen and the men were elated at the thought of their good prospects for game because of the easier tracking. As the wagon passed on the trail through her clearing Mabel could hear them singing. She was weaving, but she stopped long enough to look from her window at them. She resented their intrusion on her solitude.

Every day the men passed through her clearing, either going to the store for mail or exploring the Island. They looked at her cabin with curiosity, for Jerry had told them something about her, but they did

not approach or offer to speak with her. She kept herself aloof. If she happened to be working outdoors when they were coming toward her clearing, she went inside and closed her door as soon as she heard them talking. She had not wanted to see even those of her own race after Dawas left her, and she hated these whites. But she could not help being somewhat interested: so little ever happened that anything out of the ordinary was an event. In spite of her hatred and scorn for them she could not keep away from the window, where, hidden by the remnants of the torn curtain, she watched them striding along the old trail.

They were all clean-featured, pleasant-seeming men—men who looked as if they had never known what hunger was, or cold, or want of anything. There was a short, fat man with puffy pink cheeks who constantly laughed at what the other men said, and Mabel thought that his laugh sounded like the staccato barking of an Indian dog; there was one wiry man, quite dark, who chewed gum and spat as though he were chewing tobacco; there were two others who were wholly intent on taking home a deer to show to their friends, and anyone could see that the sooner this happened to them the better they would like it.

The fifth man had a kind face. He was tall, and when he removed his cap to turn the colored side out before entering the woods, she saw that he had red-gold hair of that peculiar color which has a particular significance to an Indian as a gift from Manitou to show His special favor. The luck of such a man passed on to

those he cared for. She still missed Dawas painfully, yet it was queer how the face of the man with the red hair came before her all that evening. She found herself longing fervently that she might have a share in the luck that must follow him. She had heard the other men call him Simpson when they shouted at him to hurry.

A week passed. Then came an early blizzard. In one day the snow piled in drifts into which Mabel sank to her knees. She was drawing a pail of water from the well when she heard a voice at her side say, "Let me do that for you. It's too heavy for any woman to lift." She turned, startled, and saw that it was Simpson. The deep snow had muffled the sound of his footsteps and she had not heard him coming. He took the pail from her hands without further ceremony and carried it to her door. Then, lifting his cap, he said, "Good day," and passed on across the clearing. There was nothing intrusive about his action, nothing offensive that she could resent; he seemed simply friendly, as he would be to a white woman.

So the next time she happened to be drawing water when he came along she waited for him to carry it for her, just as she would have expected Jerry to help her. And again he lifted the heavy pail, carried it to her door, and put it down carefully on the narrow sill. This time he did not leave immediately.

"Jerry said you might have some baskets for sale," he said. She nodded. "What colors have you?" he asked. "Come see," she invited him, so he bent his

head and entered through the low door into her cabin, removing his cap as he came.

This little act of courtesy pleased her and she smiled at him. The squalor of the place seemed to dismay him. "Do you live in this hut all winter with those two babies?" he asked again. She nodded. "This my home." He turned to the heap of baskets in the corner. "Well," he said, "you keep it clean anyway. I don't see how you do it." She only stared at him. She did not understand just what he was talking about. He looked at the baskets, holding them to the light of the window. "They're all too bright," he decided finally. "I want a blue one for my little girl, and a brown one with green or blue trimming for my wife, for her sewing. And I'll take a dozen others for my wife to give to friends if you can make them before we go next week." "What color, dose odder?" she inquired. "Oh," he answered carelessly, "just the same colors, about, that you use for Marian, my wife."

Somehow she wished to delay him; she did not want him to go away so quickly. His hair made a bright spot of color in the dusky room. "You want all round, like him?" she asked again quickly, holding up the prettiest-shaped one she had. "Yes," he answered, moved over to the door, and hesitated. Frank was wailing loudly. "Don't you mind that baby's crying? What's the matter with it? Is it sick?" he asked. Mabel looked at the crying child and then back again at Simpson, shrugged her shoulder and took up her weaving. He gazed at her as if he would like to say more,

shook his head as though he saw it would be useless, put on his cap and went out. Mabel hurried to the window and watched him as long as she could see him.

During the next two days she did not see Simpson. The other men crossed her clearing on their usual round, but he was not with them. She could not keep from wondering where he was. The third day he came just as she was returning from the well. It was almost as if he had been waiting at the edge of the woods for her to appear. He had a big package in his hands which he offered her. She questioned with her eyes, dumbly. "Toys," he said brusquely, "toys for the kids. When I thought of how much my kids have, I—well, I wanted to give your kids something, too. Vargatte brought them from town for me. It seems so damned unfair to—" He broke off suddenly—ashamed—lifted the pail of water and carried it to the cabin; then turned and left. When he reached the fringe of the woods he called back to her, "Are the baskets finished?" "No," she shouted in reply, "next day." "All right, I'll come for them tomorrow when we get back from the woods," he answered and disappeared.

The following afternoon Mabel donned the red dress. She had seen the men pass late that morning and knew they would not return until after dark. She brushed her hair carefully and when it shone black and glossy she fastened it in a loose knot at the back of her neck. She gazed in her small mirror and was pleased that she looked so well, and experienced a satisfaction in her appearance that she had not felt for some time. When

Frank cried she took him up and soothed him, not knowing why she did so. Joe Pete laughed outright when she took the baby in her arms. He forsook the new toy horse and came close to her, and smoothed the silk of the red dress as if he liked the feel of it. Somehow she was relieved and comforted as she had not been since Dawas had gone. Down along her knee went the baby hand, smoothing, smoothing the silken gown. It was that human touch which she needed. She put her arm about him and drew him close to her. Encouraged, he climbed up on to her lap beside the baby and laid his head against her breast.

Just at that moment a knock came at the door. She called to whoever knocked to enter, and Simpson stepped in. She was startled again, for she had forgotten about his coming in her satisfaction and new content with the children. And again that strange feeling stirred to life within her that only Dawas had ever awakened before. She was about to rise when Simpson said, staring at her queerly, "No, don't get up. I'll come again later after dinner. Don't disturb the children; they look so comfortable!" He came closer to her as if drawn against his will, still staring. Silently she watched him, and as he neared her, the thing that had been dead in her came fully back to life. He responded to that sudden charm. She did not attempt to draw back when he swiftly bent down to her and kissed her. "Heavens! You're a beauty—a real beauty!" he muttered. He turned away again. "I'll come back," he said. The door closed behind him.

Mabel sat yet a while dreaming. Then she gave the children some supper and put them to bed. She nested the baskets that she had completed for Simpson and tied them securely, ready for easy carrying. She ate a little—but absently. She built up the fire, took the rocker close to it, and sat down to wait for this man with the hair that was a gift from the Master of Life. A glow seemed to surround her as she sat there waiting.

Hours later his knock came again, softly, almost furtively. She did not answer aloud, nor did he need an answer. He entered without a spoken invitation. She did not speak to him even then. "Are the baskets ready?" he asked, but both knew that it did not matter now to either of them whether the baskets were finished or not. She pointed to them, but her eyes never left him. He picked up the bundle of baskets and seemed to be looking at them closely under the weak, dying light from the kerosene lamp on the table. "How much?" he queried. "Ten basket—ten dollar," she answered softly, and her voice held a caressing note in it. He took a ten-dollar bill from his pocket and put it on the table. She did not move to take it, did not even look at it. He stood looking at her. "What's made you so pretty all of a sudden?" he said wonderingly. She smiled at him. "I like you, me!" "I must have been blind"—he turned hesitantly toward the door—"but I never really saw you before." Then decisively, "I must be going." Mabel rose at last and went over to him. "No, no," she cried out to him, "no!" There was something in that cry which made him turn again

to her. For some seconds each stared deep into the eyes of the other. Suddenly he dropped the baskets and held her in a wild, close embrace. He kissed her again and again on her scarlet mouth. The lamp flame faded and flared, faded and flared, then died. Her arms went tightly around his neck.

In the morning he went away, cursing both himself and her, and in the afternoon all the men left the hunting camp on the sleigh which Mr. Vargatte had sent for them and for their luggage. When they came opposite her cabin they stopped and brought up to her door a box of canned provisions that had been left over. All except Simpson shouted "Good-bye" when the sleigh pulled out of the clearing. She called a reply to all in answer, but her eyes were fixed on Simpson until the men were driven from sight.

The winter came swiftly upon the Island again. The days were bright and bitter cold. Trails were blocked except for men on snowshoes. Mabel's ash strips for weaving were used up in December, and she would not be able to get more until May or June. Her money was depleted before the winter was half over, for she had to have some new warm blankets. Mr. Vargatte looked solemn when she bought the best blankets he had in stock. He had thought that she had better money sense than the other Indians he dealt with, but he was forced to the conclusion that none of them would ever realize the true meaning or value of money. He let her have two weeks' groceries before he could bear to tell her that she had no more money. She did not question him, nor

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did she doubt him. Jerry had told her that he was an honest man, and Jerry had never lied to an Indian. Therefore Mr. Vargatte did not lie either. She had always been told that she might trust him absolutely. He offered her credit until she could get more materials and begin weaving again, but she shook her head. She could not explain to him how she felt about it, but she was not sure that she would ever be able to pay him again, and her creed would not allow her to be dishonest with one who was honest with her.

It had now become a case either of slow starvation in her lonely backwoods hut, or of selling herself to the men from Jerry's camp. Jerry was sorry for her and tried to remonstrate with her, but he could not have her cook now for his camp because he was fairly sure that she was in the first stage of that lingering consumption which is the worst plague of the modern Indian. She had been exposed to it all the winter that Sara was with her. Jerry had often tried to explain to the Indians who worked for him the necessity for occasionally opened windows and better sanitation, but there are too many evil spirits, in the Indian belief, which are quick to take advantage of such things as open windows.

So, because her love for Joe Pete was a great love and she wanted him to live, she chose to sell herself in spite of Jerry's protests. It was the one way open to her which afforded enough to keep them in food and fire until she could weave again.

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## VIII

### HALF BREEDS

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How Mabel hated and dreaded the slow winters! They dragged so endlessly past. The little cabin in the clearing knew cold, hunger, and illness. The warmth of spring and the ever-strengthening sun had never seemed so welcome to her as it did that year. In March she tapped the trees close by and made maple sugar, but they were so short of food that they consumed the sugar almost as soon as it was made. Mabel had heard many tales, from the old men and women of the tribe, of ancient times when the tribe had had to subsist on sugar entirely. Those were seasons when the fish failed to run and game was scarce. The only food to be had in the wilderness was the sugar they could make, and the tribe thrived on this diet until the fish ran again. So, during the "sugar month" Mabel and her two children also lived on sugar and the fish which Big John brought them occasionally when his son Young John had luck in his spearing. Big John knew that she had not enough to eat, but he was in the same situation and had his own large family to keep.

Winter was always a lean time for all the Indians. It was not the season when basket material could be

procured; and there was no demand for the baskets even if they had had the material to make them. The men fished through the ice when they could not get work in the lumber camps; but fish were not plentiful at any time, and they speared barely enough for their own use. Seldom were there any left over to sell. The Indian has never learned the white man's custom of putting away for winter, and suffers accordingly.

One day toward the end of March Charlotte Shegahg came down the trail leading to the clearing and stumbled up to the cabin. When Mabel called to her to enter, she was too weak and ill to open the door. Mabel had to help her in and over to the bed. Charlotte had been on a prolonged drunken spree and had come to the Island to recuperate. Though Mabel resented her coming when food was so hard to get, she could not refuse shelter to her, for Charlotte was a sort of fourth cousin. So she took her in and made the best of it. The Indian knows that whatever incidents are to come on his trail through life will come inevitably. Charlotte was one of Mabel's incidents.

Charlotte was known even in the town as "that drunken squaw," and spent most of her time in the town jail. She was more or less of a community joke. The whites would laugh and say over their evening paper, "Well, I see Charlotte's in again. Raving crazy on Main Street last night. Where does she get it?" But not one of them ever followed the matter up to see where she did get it, nor was interested enough to see that other Indian girls did not follow Charlotte's trail.

Charlotte, through white men's abuse and whiskey, had become the worst type of degenerate Indian; depraved, hopeless and uncaring; using her few remaining wits for the only thing which mattered to her now—getting more whiskey. Fighting blindly against the whites, hating them with a fierce, scornful, unforgiving hatred, she would sell herself to those she hated if by so doing she could get that drink with which the whites had enslaved her. And the community was too occupied with its preparation and plans for city growth and prosperity to take the time to bother about Charlotte, the town drunk, or others like her. The townspeople saw the squaws toiling through their streets selling their baskets, felt sorry for them, and then promptly forgot them.

The Shegahgs had lived down on the lower end of the Island. Charlotte and her mother made baskets and picked berries to sell to the townsfolk. Her father took these things up to be sold. Sometimes he returned with food, but much of the time he did not. Then one day Charlotte went to town with him. She had never been there before. She sold the baskets and waited in front of the saloon for her father to come out, until she grew so cold and hungry that she could wait no longer. So she went in to find him. It was the worst saloon on the waterfront. She was a beautiful, slim child, with the lovely bloom of the Indian woman upon her. Her father was past caring what happened to her. That was the beginning of the end for Charlotte. Later the father was drowned. Her brother Sam was put in

prison for ten years for arson. He had tried to retaliate against the whites and had burned one of Jerry's camps—therein showing no sense of discrimination. There was no such thing as a "good white" in Sam's disordered mind.

While Charlotte was in town on one of her periodical drunks, her old, blind mother starved and froze to death, though Jerry sent food and fuel to her every week by one of his men. Now Charlotte was waiting for Sam to get out, for in two or three years his time would be up. Together they were a vicious pair, treacherous even to their own tribe if it would gain their ends.

For all these reasons Mabel did not want Charlotte in her cabin. Yet, when April came—the month when came the first chance to get basket timber if the season were an advanced one—she was glad that Charlotte was there. Charlotte would not work as other Indian women did; but she was willing to care for the children while Mabel was away getting the ash, for she was fond of them. Thus Mabel was free to get away when the other squaws invited her to join them in their first trip to cut and pound the young ash trees.

As regularly as the spring itself came to the Island came also this search by the Indian women for trees of suitable size. They must not be too old or too young to separate into strips when pounded with the axes. These trees were felled, and then were beaten for hours with the blunt ends of the axes in the cool woods until the strips broke loose and were ready to be separated into still finer strips. It was pleasant to be able to get



into the woods again, and the women were always gay on these excursions. The hollow boom—boom—boom—of their regular blows sounded through the young-leaved forest like the rhythmic beat of ancient Indian ceremonial drums. The old, old squaws, too feeble to do any pounding, but determined to accompany the younger women, sat on small pieces of folded tarpaulin, with their backs to the sun-warmed trunks of the big trees and smoked and dozed at intervals. Children sailed little ash-chip boats with leaf sails in the pools left by the melting snow. Mabel was glad to join the others on this expedition—glad that they wanted her to go. Their laughter and small talk helped to make the long labor of the pounding easier.

For some reason, though he was yet short of three years old, Joe Pete did not like Charlotte. He was uneasy when she came near him, and was actually distressed if she happened for any reason to take Frank in her arms. Mabel noticed his aversion, but could not understand the reason behind it. As far as she could see, Charlotte was uniformly and tolerantly kind to him. Joe Pete allowed few persons to touch him. It was an instinctive shrinking—he was seemingly not conscious of it—but he slid out from under the approaching hand like a shy woods animal. Big John, Jerry, and Mabel were the only persons whose touch he could endure. The touch of others seemed to cause real discomfort to the child.

When Charlotte attempted to take him up he hid under the bed and stayed there until his mother came



home, or Frank's crying drew him out to comfort him. If Charlotte persisted and gathered him up by force, he silently but vengefully bit her, leaving the marks of his small teeth deep in her arm. Strange to say, she did not punish him nor resent this in the least, but laughed at him with real, appreciative enjoyment, and liked him the better for it. After she had learned how he felt, though he was only a baby, she respected his wishes with that courteous tolerance which is so typical of the thoroughbred Indian, and did not touch him again.

So the child tolerated her also, but intuitively and without any obvious reason hated her. It was his first expression of real dislike for anyone, and though Mabel was jealous of any affection on his part for others than herself, and was pleased with his open display of enmity toward Charlotte, she often wondered about it. She never wanted him to feel so toward her, but she began to think that in time he might do so, and often worried more than she would have cared to own, even to herself. Always on her return she found him patiently waiting on the step for her, and though she never showed it, she was much pleased that he did this. It eased her worry somewhat. It also made her feel sure of his lasting affection, and gave her that "safe" feeling that she so much desired. She knew that she had gone "wrong," had disobeyed even the Indian rules of morality; but she also had the feeling that, as long as her child loved her, she was not fully an outcast like Charlotte.

She brought home much "timber" from her woods trips and her basket weaving began. She experienced again that strange stiffness in her fingers, and the weaving was slow and discouraging. She felt wretched most of the summer and hated to go to town with the finished baskets. The long, weary tramping up and down the streets to find customers for her baskets tired her to a sick, dizzy fatigue, and often she followed the trail home with difficulty. There were times when Mrs. Big John watched Mabel stumbling past the Big John cabin, and sadly wondered if she had been drinking. Several times she sent Charlotte up with the baskets, but that was worse than useless. Charlotte came back in bad condition and usually penniless.

In June, July, and August she made a good profit from her wares. These were the months when the tourists flocked north into the cool resort region. It was easy to sell them, and almost always they gave her more money than she asked for the baskets. They were a generous, kindly lot, these tourists, and they were a boon to the Indian women. Mary often went with her, and the two sold all their baskets at good prices.

Now once again they had enough to eat, and the beautiful summer days were very pleasant. Frank was ill during the two mosquito months, but after he recovered he seemed much better and stronger than before he had been ill. He began to walk, and though he constantly fell over objects on the floor and bumped into other things in the cluttered room, he persisted in his efforts, and both women were amazed at the sense of

location which he developed. It almost seemed to his mother that he saw with his fingers, for his sensitiveness of touch was fairly uncanny. Joe Pete hovered over him constantly while he was learning to walk, guiding him around chairs and the stove, and helping him upon his feet again when he fell. There was a great affection between these two. Even when Frank was badly hurt by a bump or fall, the gentle touch of Joe Pete's hands stopped his tears and he would smile and go on. Mabel often looked up from her weaving to watch, but her gaze and admiration were all for Joe Pete. She seldom looked at Frank, and then only with complete indifference. If he came close to her, wanting loving, she pushed him roughly away. He soon learned not to come to her.

The new baby was born the first week of September. It was another perfectly formed baby—a girl baby. Charlotte was there when the child was born, which was fortunate, for Mabel would have died if she had not had help. She was very ill after this baby was born, so Charlotte stayed on. Though hers was a most careless and ignorant nursing, it was better than none, and Mabel dreaded being left alone.

Mabel asked to see the child as soon as she was her normal self again. She looked long and intently at the tiny, lovely features; the little, slim fingers; the beautiful, brown eyes. The baby's skin was almost white and her hair was golden red. Mabel ran her fingers through the silky fuzz on the baby's head, and a queer, almost hungry expression came into her eyes. It disappeared

quickly again, however, before Charlotte saw it, and she was soon as dully indifferent to this baby as she was to Frank.

The new baby was no trouble to her. It never cried; even though the tiny mouth puckered into pain-lines and the lips parted as though to cry, no sound came. She slept most of the time. Noises which woke the other two children did not seem to disturb her. When Mabel thought about it at all, she was inclined to wonder a little; but she did not care for the baby so her wonder was neither active nor lasting. It was Charlotte who named the baby Elizabeth. She had heard the name somewhere and liked it. Mabel silently agreed to the name when Charlotte suggested it. One name was as good as another when one had to think of more important things, such as weaving, food, and fuel.

By the end of September she was better again, and Charlotte left. She did not tell Mabel that she was going; she simply walked out of the cabin one morning and did not come back. Some of the Islanders brought news that she had a job in town, others said she had gone with an Indian to an island farther down the river. No one cared. Outside the ties of distant kinship there had been no real bond of friendship or affection between the two women; yet, after Charlotte left, the cabin seemed rather lonely to Mabel—there was a feeling of emptiness that she found hard to bear. She began to talk to Joe Pete, and he responded in a way that made her think of the sudden blossoming of a violet under the spring sun. His pleasure at her inter-

est led him into doing unusual things to please her into laughter, essaying odd little questions of "how" and "why" that the ordinary Indian baby does not get a chance to ask. He seemed to understand things far beyond what a child of three ordinarily fathoms, and she answered his questions with pleasure.

While Charlotte had been with them he had been so silent and reserved, even with his mother, that she had half forgotten his funny little ways and habits. They came back to him and she got from them a quiet but satisfying joy. Though she never now felt the desire so frequently as she had during his first year, there were times that she could not keep from picking him up and holding him tight to her for a moment. And Joe Pete always responded instantly by dropping his head on her shoulder and pressing his cheek deep into the warm hollow there.

She began telling him the old tribal tales that Dawas had told him, with others that the old herb-woman, her grandmother, had told her—tales that had been passed down to the tribe through generations, kept alive by the "old ones" and given new life around the sugar fire and the fires of the berrying camps. She told him over and over again the wonder tales of the Ojibways; the story of Gitchi-Manitou, Master of Life; the Creed of the Four Winds; tales of medicine men and witch women; origin-stories of animals and trees. The child listened to them all with fascinated attention. They were the foundation for his beliefs and for other tales he was to hear later from Big John and the old men in the camps.



The beautiful, dignified words came into and became part of his vocabulary as he repeated them over after her. The little Frank tried to imitate him and say the new words too, as though he loved the music of them.

In September the men had started work again in the lumber camp. Jerry had spent a month getting things in readiness for the beginning of operations again. One day he stopped in to ask her if she would go over to the hunting camp and clean it so it would be in condition for the hunters when they came. This was the first inkling she had that they were coming again. She refused to clean the lodge, giving as her reason the new baby which tied her to her own cabin. Jerry had not known there was a new baby and asked to see the child. She brought the baby defiantly out into the bright sunlight. Elizabeth blinked and smiled. Jerry was fond of children. He took her gently and looked at her. "Her eyes are all right, eh?" he questioned. She nodded.

He looked at the baby again,—the skin color had caught his attention. "She's no Indian papoose, Mabel!" he said.

"Yes, he Indun," she insisted.

"You're an awful liar, Mabel," he contradicted her, politely enough to give her no offense. "No Indian papoose ever had skin as white as this child's and red hair. She's part white, the poor little devil!"

She refused to answer, shrugging her shoulder indifferently in the old way he knew so well. He shook his head hopelessly.

“If a fellow could only make you Indians see the only way out—could ever get you to realize the shame these half-breed children are to your race as well as to the white men who breed them! What chance has this baby, Mabel, either in the ways of the whites or the life of your own tribe? She’s a misfit both places. But hell—what’s the use?—it’s hopeless! You know the end of it all as well as I do. I may as well shut my mouth.”

She nodded again, half understanding in a dull, unresentful way what he meant, and yet not fully comprehending his meaning. They were speaking from two creeds of morals and philosophies of life, as different and as far apart as north and south, and neither would ever understand the other. She was incapable of imagining the end in store for her as the result of the life she had now begun to lead, and all his frank pictures of it only made her more firmly believe that he was trying to scare her, for some reason she did not fully understand. Jerry was kind and knew more than any other white about Indian feelings and emotions, but she knew best about the way she wished to live her own life. So she made little effort to understand his meaning.

Joe Pete came out of the cabin, leading Frank carefully by the hand. Jerry pointed to them.

“There’s a living example of what I mean,” he said. Then, simply, so she might get his implication, “Those two are not alike, Mabel. The thoroughbred and the half-breed are different. Do you see?”



She missed his point entirely, though agreeing with him.

"No, no," she answered. "No. Joe Pete not like that Frank!"

Jerry tossed Joe Pete high into the air, and the child laughed with pleasure. "I'm hoping that this one gets away from it," Jerry said. "Getting away and having a chance to learn the ins and outs of the thing as it is today will save him, and in turn he may show the rest of you the way out. If I'm here when he's big enough to go—"

He broke off, set Joe Pete down abruptly, handed Mabel the key to the hunting lodge, and when she accepted it swung on down the trail to the lumber camps. Mabel turned and went into the cabin. She looked at the key held close in her hand, and again there flashed into her eyes that expression of hungry longing that had come into them when her fingers had passed over the head of her red-haired baby.

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## IX

### SIMPSON

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Mabel spent a week cleaning and settling the lodge in preparation for the opening of the second season for the hunters from the south. She took the three children with her always and they stayed the whole day in the lodge. To all of them it was like being in another world. The big, open fireplace was a special delight to the children and held a peculiar fascination for Mabel. She wished often that she had one like it in her cabin. In the afternoons, when she was worn out with scrubbing and cleaning, she and the little ones sat watching the fire which they built there, and drowsed and dreamed. The baby Elizabeth slept soundly on a deep, thick rug spread in front of the fire. It was a taste of a life they did not know, and they enjoyed it to the utmost while it was theirs.

All the small details held the wonder of strangeness for them: the shining beam-logs which supported the second floor and caught the light from the fire, flickering as though they too were burning; the flowered hangings at the windows; the rich and varied colors of the rugs and couches; the books; the convenient kitchen with water pumped into a white sink; the clean, white-iron beds upstairs in the one huge room which took up

all the space above the living room. They had a sensation of luxury which they had never before experienced.

So to prolong this experience to the last possible moment, Mabel worked leisurely at the cleaning and enjoyed the acquaintance with new objects, though at the same time they somehow made her feel the difference between herself and the man with the red hair, whom the other men called Simpson. She wondered how he had ever happened to come into her mean little cabin and, once inside, why he had stayed. And it was now that she had a faint inkling of what he had meant when he asked her so amazedly if she and the children spent the winter there. She had no thought of envy or wanting these same comforts. There were no Indian homes on the Island that were not like her own, so the desire for such luxuries never once entered her head.

The week passed more quickly than she could have imagined. When Jerry came again for the key, which he was to leave with Mr. Vargatte, she was loath to give it up to him. It was as though she were relinquishing a wand which opened a door to a wonderland of pleasure, a land which can easily be reached by the white man through books and pictures, but to which the Indian has not the magic key, nor the means with which to buy it. Jerry knew that the lodge must have impressed her and was curious to hear her express her opinion about it. He said to her, "What did you think of the lodge, Mabel? Did you like it?"

"It nice place," was her answer.

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Even to Jerry she could not express that sense of pleasure she had felt there.

"It ought to be," he answered. "They spent enough money on it! It's a new toy for them to play with. In a year or two, though, they'll be sick of it. The newness of it all will wear off soon enough, and then they'll never come back again."

She did not reply, and he looked at her keenly.

"Remember that, Mabel," he said. "They'll never come back, and they'll forget the woods. Don't let them pull the wool over your eyes. If they come over to the cabin, kick them out. They're nice enough fellows, but they're up here for a lark, and we're all part of the fun for them. You're only part of it too. We don't want any more white children living in Indian huts. They don't fit."

He went off, singing an old song of love and war which he had picked up from the Indians. She stood in the doorway and listened until the last, faint note died, then went inside. The days were again sharply cold, and the enclosing forest gleamed with occasional color that was like flame, where a few last, late-turning leaves yet clung to the limbs of the maples. She felt chilled, and a presentiment of loss that had come with Jerry's words hung to her. Jerry was seldom mistaken in his judgments. What if he were right about the red-headed man's never coming back! Would he forget the woods too? *Could* he forget? Was there nothing that an Indian woman might do to keep herself in his remembrance? Any way in which she could hold even a

small place in his thoughts? Even an occasional thought in the mind of this man whom Manitou so highly favored would ward off bad luck from Joe Pete and herself. It did not matter about the other children. As Jerry had said, they did not fit, and would never seem like her own. But Joe Pete! He *was* her own; as much a part of her as her own hand. Nothing but good must come to him. Her mind circled round and round in a haze of ideas and, like a man lost in the woods, always returned to the starting place—Jerry's words, "They will never come back. They will forget the woods."

Then a new idea came to her, and relief came with it. She had heard that white men had great love for their children. She knew many Indian women who were getting money from white men to feed the white babies in their cabins. She had heard Simpson often speak fondly of his two children; she had never heard an Indian man do so. He had said there was nothing he would not do for his little girl at home. Could she, through the baby Elizabeth, keep remembrance of her in his thoughts? Just remembrance—so that Joe Pete might not have too much hardship in his life through her missteps. She took the baby in her arms, for the only time with interest, and again looked at her searchingly, seeking every point of resemblance to Simpson.

She could not miss the likeness. Except for the eyes, which were the color and shape of her own, the baby did not look like an Indian. Her skin had become whiter, and her hair a deeper red. She wondered if Elizabeth

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might also carry the luck and decided to ask the old medicine man about it, when he came on his next visit to the Island. She knew Simpson preferred cleanliness. She wasted no time in gathering up all the baby's rags of clothing and washing them. She would hold him through his baby if possible. She would try her own charms again first—if that failed she would not hesitate to use his child.

Two or three days later, on the day before hunting season opened, the same group of five men drove past with Mr. Vargatte in his light wagon. They waved and yelled a hilarious greeting at her as they went through her clearing, but they did not stop. Behind them Mr. Vargatte's big wagon followed more slowly, carrying the heavy luggage and a huge load of provisions. It came over the trail with difficulty, for Mr. Vargatte's chore boy—Young John, favorite son of Big John—was no expert driver, and had a hard time guiding his horses on a bad road. He was more accustomed to the steering of a boat or canoe.

With a great creaking of wheels the wagon passed through, and Mabel stood by the well and listened until the noise ceased and she knew the wagon had stopped in front of the lodge. She had seen Simpson! True, he had not looked at her, or called to her as the other men did, but at least he had come back. Joy surged over her in waves that left her weak and upset. Now that she had actually seen him her excitement was intense. She walked up and down the cabin floor, up and down, up and down monotonously, until she could not bear to



stay indoors another second. Elizabeth was asleep and would stay asleep for an hour. Joe Pete and Frank would be safe for a while alone. She threw her old sweater around her shoulders and ran from the cabin into the woods. She deliberately chose the worst trail she knew, a trail almost obliterated by a dense growth of ground hemlock which tripped the unwary foot and tore viciously at the clothing. She walked and walked, fighting her way through the clinging, hindering hemlock and tearing her stockings and skirt. Through the rents in the stockings her flesh became red and swollen from the scratching of the malevolent, green underbrush.

An hour of this effort brought relief, and she rested for a few moments before she must start back again. She could think more clearly, and felt better for the physical strain she had undergone. Things resumed their everyday appearance to her again. She had somehow been badly frightened and had lost her head at the sight of Simpson. She needed all her wits for the struggle that she was determined to force between them. Why had Jerry told her this thing unless to scare her? He was to blame for all this unrest which had possessed her since the day he came for the key and filled her mind with this thought which had so wrought upon her emotions. She had been foolish to become so frightened. Jerry was always wanting the Indians to live by his code, and of course they all knew that it could not be. The Indian must follow his own code and his own trail no matter where they might lead. She turned and



fought her way home again, arriving there weary, but with her mind quiet and ready for whatever might come. Elizabeth was awake when she returned, and Joe Pete and Frank were hungry. She fed them and put them to bed; then she ate a little and dropped into bed also. She fell into a deep sleep.

The next day she hunted out the red dress. She had not had it on since the day Simpson left the year before. She had rolled it again in a wad and had thrown it on a shelf in the small inner room of the cabin. Now she smoothed out the soft folds of it, and hoped its spell would work again for her. She shook the dust from it and held it up to her shoulders before her mirror. She had become much thinner since she had last worn it, and there were deep lines in her face. She had already begun to look like the worn old women of her race. Hunger, cold, and illness had taken their toll from her beauty. Hastily she let her hair down and brushed it. It did not lie in the soft lines of last year. Neglect seemed to have thinned and coarsened it. She persisted in her brushing and finally put it in order. She cleaned the cabin and sat down to wait for Simpson to come.

Joe Pete stared at her as though he had never seen her before. She smiled but there was no answering smile from him, nor did he offer to approach her. Frank searched the room for him, but Joe Pete was too intent on the strange appearance of his mother to notice or call to him in guidance. Finally Frank stumbled over him. Joe Pete took his hand and Frank set-

tled down beside him and became contentedly quiet. They too waited with her.

Time passed and he did not come. Mabel had the watchful quietness of a waiting animal. She could sit perfectly motionless for hours. The children grew restless and asked for food. She gave it to them absently; then sat down again to listen for approaching footsteps. Frank asked for water, but she did not hear him. Joe Pete dipped a cup into the pail and gave him a drink. The two began to play about the room. She did not seem to notice them. Again at dusk they asked for food. Again she fed them and forgot them. They played a short while longer, then climbed up on their bed and went to sleep. The room became very quiet and dark—almost black. The window showed like a fainter patch of darkness. A rat came noiselessly from the inner room and ate the crumbs left on the floor by the children. Mabel sat motionless, with straining ears, afraid to move lest she should miss the slightest sound from the trail. The rat ran across her foot and startled her into sudden movement. She sprang to her feet, and realized that Simpson was not coming. Jerry's words came to her again, bringing hopelessness with them. Slowly she removed the red dress and hung it on a nail in the wall. She crept into bed beside the children and lay there for a long time, wondering why he had not come. Before she fell asleep she had decided to use the baby to make him come.

In the morning she heard the men pass the cabin. They were on their way to the cedar swamp where the

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deer were yarding for food. Simpson was not with them. She took this for a good sign. She was sure now that he would come after the others had passed—that he had made some excuse to them to linger until they had gone. She hurried to clean the children and put on the red dress, and again sat down to wait for him. She went to the window every few moments, watching for him. She paced back and forth across the room. Her eagerness and certainty kept her moving impatiently. But he did not come. Late that night she once more removed the silken dress and crept into bed. Joe Pete had not come near her all that day, and had stared at her as though he were wondering at her strange actions.

All that week the same thing was repeated daily. Every day she donned the red dress, and as though it were a danger signal Joe Pete kept away from her. She invited him to come to her lap, but he only stared at her as though she were a stranger to him. Constantly he watched her, just as if he were trying to think out some big thing that was as yet beyond his comprehension, and there was something in his gaze which reminded her of the way he had used to look at Charlotte. Each morning the men passed the cabin. The fat man, whose laugh made her think of a dog barking, got into a habit of coming up to her door as they passed and bantering her. Sometimes Simpson was with the men, sometimes he was not. She bore with the familiarity of the fat man because she hoped that some time Simpson would come with him. But

he always passed with a cool "Good morning." Finally she realized that he was not coming—that he was purposely keeping away from her.

It was then that hope left her and she determined that she would see him anyway. The red dress had become soiled from every-day wearing and caring for the children with it on. It was the only dress she had, and she knew Simpson would not like it dirty. She tried to wash it and the color ran. It was a wreck when she took it from the basin. Now that the color of it was gone, one saw only the flimsy, cheap material of which it was made, and when she put it on again she knew that she lost something of the charm which was natural to her. Her old clothes would have been better, but she did not know it. She sat by the window watching the trail, waiting for a chance to speak with him alone.

Her chance came. At sunset the men returned from the hunt and Simpson was not with them. She was getting water from the well as they passed through her clearing. The fat man came up to talk with her. She smiled at him invitingly.

"You catch deer, you?" she asked him.

"Nope. Never even saw one," he said. "At least not a four-legged one," he added, looking at her foolishly.

Now was her time to get what information she wanted. She encouraged him, "You catch him yet!"

"I hope so," he answered. "I'm gettin' awful sick of wanderin' through these darn woods lookin' for

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somethin' that isn't in them. I'll be glad when the fellows decide to go home."

Her heart sank. Jerry was right then! She summoned all her courage to ask him her next question:

"Where is fellow with red hairs?"

"What!" He looked at her queerly. "Oh," he answered, "you mean Simpson. He left us early and went to the postoffice to get the mail and to ask Vargatte when he can make it to take us out."

"You all going?" she asked again. "When?"

"I don't know," he answered carelessly. "In a day or so maybe. The sooner the better." He winked openly at her; then lowered his voice and asked furtively, looking all around, "You got any baskets you want to sell? I'd be willin' to buy a few to take home with me."

"No basket," she answered dully. She had found out what she wanted to know, and had no further use for him. She only wished now to get rid of him as soon as might be. Again he stared at her. "Oh, all right then," he said, and went off.

She tied the frayed end of the rope to the handle of the tin pail and dropped it into the well. It filled and sank. The water looked black as the pail sank into it. She stared down at it, and thought of the witch-brew she had heard her mother tell about. Once a man or woman drank of it he had wonderful dreams and visions, but was a slave to the witch who offered the drink. She shivered and pulled her ragged sweater closer about her. She hurried to pull up the pail again,

and as she was untying the well-rope, she saw Simpson coming through the woods. She waited for him to come nearer. He came along with his head bent, and did not notice her standing there in the dusk until he was almost upon her. He was forced to speak. "Good evening," he said, lifted his cap, and passed her. She called to him, "Wait."

He turned.

"Wait," she said again, and he could barely hear her voice, it trembled so.

"What is it, Mabel?" he said, not unkindly. "I can't wait."

She was silent a moment until her voice steadied. "Jus' one minute," she pleaded, "I wan' speak wit' you."

He waited, but did not speak.

"You don' come see me," she said mournfully.

He grew impatient. "I didn't dare to come, Mabel," he said frankly. "You know what happened before, and it can't happen again. Not that it was any more your fault than mine, but—well, I couldn't risk it. There's a primitive pull about you that I'm afraid of. It gets a man in spite of himself."

"Jus' come for minute?" she asked.

"Can't do it, Mabel," he answered. "I almost didn't come north this year at all. I only came because I wanted to see if there was enough in you to justify me in losing my head and forgetting that I had a wife and children. And I've found that there was. I'll do anything to help you if you're hard up, but I can't go with you."


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She said simply, "You mus' come. I have somet'ing to show."

"I don't want to see anything," he said, and turned to leave her. She caught his sleeve. "You mus', you mus'." She spoke now defiantly. "I show you somet'ing is belong to you."

He wondered what she might mean. "But I didn't lose anything."

"Come," she said, and pulled him along with her.

She went inside first and lighted the lamp; then called to him to enter. He came unwillingly, and stood just inside the door. Mabel went over to the box where Elizabeth slept, hesitated a moment, and if he had looked at her kindly or smiled at her, she would never have forced the issue upon him. But he stood aloof. She lifted the baby and brought her over to him. As she came nearer, carrying the child, his face turned gray, and he held out his hands in front of it as though to guard against a sight which he could not bear. She did not spare him, and held the light close to the baby's head. Elizabeth woke and blinked at the lamp flame so close to her eyes. Mabel held her out to Simpson. "Take him, that Lizbet!" she commanded him.

His hands dropped to his sides. "You're not saying that she's mine!" he exclaimed.

Mabel still held the baby out toward him, and at last he took her dazedly. The light from the lamp, held close by Mabel, shone on the silky red hair and the beautiful, regular features of the baby. "You're lying to me, Mabel?" he begged.



She kept silent, but even as he had asked the question he knew that this child was undeniably his. Except for the brown eyes there was a startling resemblance to his small daughter at home. Still he could not make himself realize that this thing had happened to him. He gave the baby back to her and sat down in the chair to think over the intolerable situation. There must be some way out of this mess. He knew that he was as much to blame as she, and he was a fair dealing man. He bowed his head in his hands, and a spasm of anger shot through him at his own idiocy in allowing such a thing to happen. What would his wife say if she knew! She would be justified in leaving him instantly and taking their two children with her. He pictured them, waiting for his return from camp. And this red-headed Indian papoose was his, just as much as they were his. What duty did he owe this little half-breed! Lord! Lord! How could any sane man have been such a fool as to have been blinded by a rag of a red dress which gave a momentary fascination to a squaw? He groaned, and Mabel winced, in spite of her resolution to tie him with this baby. Not for one moment did she think she was essaying the impossible.

He stood and faced her, but at the expression in her eyes his anger went, and in him was only sorrow for both of them. And suddenly Mabel, with a swift flash of insight, understood the real situation as it was for Simpson. Swiftly she braced herself for the sacrifice which she felt she must make. It was always the man who was the truly helpless one. It was always the

woman who must give up for the man. Both in the Indian and the white systems was this true. She spoke quietly, after a time, and he never guessed what the words cost her, nor what hopes she gave up with the speaking of them. "I keep him, me. You go 'way now. He all Indun baby."

He answered her quickly and honestly. "No, the child's as much mine as she is yours. But what under heaven can I do to make it right?" He looked around the squalid room and knew fully and miserably what the fate of his half-breed child would be. She would live in this wretched hut. Hunger and cold would be her lot. When she became a woman, she would go the way that Mabel had gone, for there was no chance for her to learn any other way of life. With no desire on her part, through him she had been forced on to the Indian Trail of Life, and he knew enough now to realize that it is a hard, solitary trail that the Indian walks.

His other little girl would always have love and comfort as her share of life. Her path would be made smooth and easy for her dainty feet to tread. The contrast in the lives which these children would lead made him feel ill. Perspiration stood out on his forehead. He seemed to be sinking down into black pool, and he came back from it with a great effort and found Mabel watching him. He was too much concerned with his own trouble to see the trembling of her lips. He said to her desperately, "Will you take money? Enough each month to keep the baby?"

She looked at him through eyes that were like slits.

If he sent money every month, she would still hold a place in his thoughts and her luck would hold. By giving in she had won. She nodded, and her eyes were fathomless. He did some rapid mental figuring. "How much?" he asked her.

Mabel shrugged her shoulders and did not answer. The money did not matter so much. She could easily get more from the men at the lumber camps. His keeping her in memory meant more than the money. If only he could see that that was what she wanted, she would not take the money.

"Will twenty dollars be enough?" he questioned.

"Too much," she lied quietly, "ten dollar plenty."

He looked at her to see if she might possibly be serious about it, and it seemed to him that she was. Somehow it lessened his sense of shame over the affair. She was not out for the money anyway, he thought; in that one respect at least she was different from others of her kind.

"That doesn't sound like much," he said, and his voice was quieter.

"It plenty," she repeated, and he gave in.

"Ten dollars it is then. I'll send you a check every month. If you ever need more for her, tell Jerry or Vargatte to write me. Will you promise you'll never tell?"

She nodded.

He searched through his pockets and put all the money he had on the table. Then he turned to the door. "Remember to let me know if you need help," he said

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again, pointlessly. She realized that he was going out of her life.

"You come next year?" she asked, questioning fate itself.

"No. No more of this for me. I never want to see the woods again."

She thought of Jerry's words when he had predicted this very thing that was happening. Simpson opened the door. She went close to him, and greatly daring, took his hand. He looked awkwardly at her, but did not offer to kiss her. She let his hand drop again. He said good-bye and went out. The door closed behind him. She went to the window for a last glimpse of him, but he had merged into the darkness. Sheer misery flooded her body and she was very ill. She put the sleeping Elizabeth back in her box, and slowly undressed.

Before she got into bed she rolled the silk dress up into a bundle, opened the front of the stove, and thrust it in. It burst into orange flames, and she watched it until the last shred of cloth burned and changed into gray ash. She laughed loudly, and there was no mirth in the sound. She knew she had lost something, but she did not analyze enough to know what it was that she had lost. All the softness had gone out of her, and hard bitterness had taken its place. The little burst of flame died out. Again she felt that her Trail of Life was but a series of quickly closing incidents. Other women held their men, but she could not. Yet she was more beautiful than they. She shrugged her shoulders

and laughed again. Her eyes were dry and smarting, yet she did not feel like crying. Somehow she had the feeling that she would recover from this incident more quickly than she had from the others.

As though even in sleep he knew that the red dress was gone and that once more his mother was his own, Joe Pete snuggled up close to her and threw his plump, warm arm over her shoulder. That human touch again! Almost instantly she fell asleep.

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X

RED-HEADED LUCK

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The year after Simpson left, never to return, Mabel's life fell back into the old groove. The winter came early and stayed long. Cold visited the cabin in the little clearing at intervals through the winter when she did not have fuel. And even when fuel was plentiful it was difficult to keep the cabin warm against the bitter winds that beat down out of the north.

Illness had come to stay with her. She knew that she did not have the strength that she had had two or three years back. She could not do the heavy work that she had always done, and her fingers became so stiff that she was unable to weave enough baskets to make a worth-while load for Mary to take to town with her. Hard labor, such as pounding the "timber," set her coughing in an annoying way. This irritating cough was the only symptom of her failing health that she seemed to dread—it reminded her too vividly of the child Sara and her agony of suffering before her death in the camp. Yet she consoled herself by remembering Indian women she knew who had coughed for years, and yet nothing had happened to them. She would not let herself believe that these squaws were none the less doomed, though the disease worked upon them slowly.



Hunger seldom came now, except when the new-fallen snow whirled into layers and drifts so soft that her snowshoes sank into it too deeply, and she could not get through to the store for groceries. The money came regularly from Simpson, and with what the men from the camps gave her, it was enough to keep her supplied with the kind of food that they preferred.

The menu of the average Indian family was a simple one, even when they had what they liked best: bread, cornmeal porridge with syrup poured over it for sweetening, strong black tea with plenty of sugar in it, a few potatoes and onions. Sometimes they had bacon, but not often. Big John continued to send fish to Mabel whenever he had any to spare, and that comprised their meat diet. Mr. Vargatte often wondered what was back of it all when she made her mark on the check and he cashed it for her. He could not help seeing that it came from Simpson, and he made a shrewd guess as to the reason for it. He would have thought that Simpson was a man of better sense than to get tangled up with a squaw; but that was Simpson's business, not his. When he heard that the hunting lodge was put up for sale, he was positive that his guess was correct, because Simpson had invested the most money in it. But he never mentioned the fact to anyone, even his wife. He felt that it was the affair solely of the two most concerned in it. Mabel continued to receive the same kindness and courteous treatment from him that she always had.

In the spring the other squaws invited her to go with



them again after ash timber, and those who had no babies to carry offered to help her with Elizabeth. She went once with them, but refused to go again. She felt that she did not have to go when she was getting ten dollars every month, and she was afraid of the cough which always kept her awake at night after she had exerted herself strenuously at the work in the woods. The older women looked at her and shook their heads, but offered no criticism. They all knew that much of her money came from the men in the camps. They also knew from bitter experience that this led to a final, dreadful disease. Mrs. Big John did venture greatly once and try to convince her of what lay ahead of her if she persisted in her course. She pictured the repulsiveness of the infection after it developed to a certain stage, aggravated by her lung sickness. She told her she would become ugly, and men would no longer want her; but Mabel would not reply. She knew dully that her old friend was right, but she could not work herself into an active state of worrying much about any of it.

One day in June Mary came along on her way home from town, and told Mabel the news she had heard from Big John as she had passed through the Settlement. The only medicine man left in their tribe was coming up from an island farther down the river, and the men were already setting up his tent in a distant, isolated clearing. The word was secretly passed around among the Indians, for they did not want any interfering whites about. Mabel decided to take this opportunity to

discover if Simpson's red-haired luck passed on in any way to his child. She wanted also to obtain some medicine from him to stop her cough. He had helped many Indians whom white doctors, with all their skill, had not been able to cure.

Mary came to call for her in the evening, and the two women prepared to set out, carrying their gifts of tobacco. Elizabeth was securely tied to Mabel's back. Joe Pete and Frank were left at home. Joe Pete was almost five years old now, and Mabel depended entirely on him for the care of Frank, as well as for many little errands. She ordered him to stay in the house and to keep Frank inside also. He was to be especially sure to leave the door closed. He promised, looking at her solemnly, and she knew he would keep his word. She had imbued him with too deep a fear of the will-of-the-wisp and the wicked woods-spirits to leave any likelihood of his forgetting to close the door against them.

Joe Pete did not like to be left alone, but he had never told his mother. He watched the women as long as he could see them from the window. They took an old, seldom-used trail which circled around and avoided the Settlement. They would come back openly, for then there would be no danger of curious, scoffing followers; and Mabel needed some cornmeal, which she intended to stop for at the store on the way home. They soon ceased talking, for the trail was very dim in the swift-coming dusk of the thick woods, where the blackness of night first settled before seeping out in

thick folds into the clearings. Many Indians were traveling on the same trail. They too went quickly, secretly, avoiding the whites. The two women glimpsed them occasionally, but no one greeted another on the trail this night.

It was a relief to both the women when they stepped out at last from the woods into the smooth little hollow where the tent of the medicine man stood. It was merely a circle of common, dirty canvas, open at the top, stretched tightly about eight poles firmly driven into the ground. A group of watchful, waiting Indians sat around the tent, not too close. Already the medicine man was inside. There were many requests to be heard and there was always the chance that they might be interrupted by jeering whites from the Settlement, no matter how secretly the word had been passed.

A thin, blue haze of smoke began to issue from the opening at the top of the tepee. This was the sign that the "medicine" was strong and working, and requests could be heard. No one moved immediately. All stared at the twisting smoke with awe and a sort of fear. In many of them the old beliefs of the tribe were almost submerged under the newer ideas inculcated by the whites. But at the sight of the smoke sign, a glamorous something came flashing back to them from the past. The old strength of the tribe was with them yet. They knew that the "medicine" was worn down to a very small fragment of the bulk it had once been, but it was still powerful enough to perform the ancient magic. This was one power which could never be taken away

from them. The "medicine" would not work for the whites. A sudden, fierce race-pride flamed through every Ojibway Indian who sat and watched this smoke symbol of old-time greatness and racial strength. Soon enough the glow would fade out of their hearts again, but for these few hours it blazed high. The medicine man called in a high, shrill voice that was not his own. They were to make their demands, and what was wise would be granted to them.

Big John, because of his rank, was the first to approach the tepee. He threw his gifts over the top into the tent and waited until the smoke died away. Then he put his question. He had lost his skiff four weeks before and had been unable to find it. He wanted to know where it was. Almost before he had asked the question the smoke again floated above the tent in thick spirals. He waited for a few moments, and then the answer came. His boat was in a certain little cove farther down the river. It had drifted in behind the high reeds and could not be seen from the deep water. Big John stepped back to the waiting group and seated himself again, satisfied that he had heard the truth.

A squaw who had very sore eyes went next. Her man led her carefully up to the tepee and cast the gifts over for her. She asked who had wished the bad medicine into her eyes, and if the medicine man could give her a cure for them. Again the smoke came forth in clouds. There came simultaneously that strange voice of the spirit which had taken possession of the medicine man, telling her what she asked of him. He threw a

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narrow bandage out to her with specific directions to keep it fastened on her eyes while her man smoked two pipes. If she followed directions, he assured her that her eyes would be cured.

Others came up and went through the same procedure, getting their answers and cures. Finally it was Mary's turn. Her oldest child had lately been having fits and she wanted a cure for him. The white doctor had not succeeded in curing the child. The medicine man tossed to her a smooth, white object that looked like a stone, and directed her to rub it on the child's neck and chest.

After Mary's came Mabel's turn. She threw her packages of tobacco over into the tent. The blue smoke soared high. She held Elizabeth out in her arms as though the medicine man could see through the thick canvas walls of the tent, and for a while her voice would not come. Then the words broke through. In the Indian tongue she asked, "Does the luck of the white man with the red hair pass to his child? Will she carry the favor of Manitou?"

For a long while there was silence, and she thought the answer was not coming. The smoke rose once more, and, muffled as though the spirit of the medicine man were far distant, the answer came: "No. She carries not his luck, nor yet the favor of Manitou." Though Mabel had felt that this would be her answer, she now held a double resentment toward the child. She had wasted the good tobacco on a useless quest. She was so intent on her thoughts that she did not notice

the smoke still floating from the tent: the sign that she had not received all her answer. Suddenly there came more words from out the smoke. The voice was louder now, coming so distinctly that all the group could hear. There was an ugly, rasping tone in it. "The child carries black luck! Her ears are closed. Because her ears are closed, she shall not speak. She shall be ever wrapped in a blanket of silence."

These words of the medicine man made Elizabeth's lot harder than ever for her. If they had been favorable, she would have received consideration—if not love—from her mother because of the luck; but as it was, Mabel felt nothing but hatred for her as an added, useless burden. Deaf! And, because of that deafness, dumb also! Was not a blind child enough of a burden? Almost mechanically she picked up the plaster the medicine man threw to her with directions to put it on her chest when she felt the cough coming. Instead of carrying luck the child was cursed. Never once did Mabel think of blaming herself for the baby's condition, in spite of Jerry's plain statements to her. Though the entire group had heard the verdict of the medicine man, not a word was spoken to her in sympathy. Many of the Indians there knew that Elizabeth was a half-breed baby, and defects such as these were so common in the halfbreed that they excited no comment. They did not even feel pity for her.

Mary came up to the mound where Mabel sat brooding and whispered to her that they had better go to the store. It was getting late and Mary's children were



alone, as were Joe Pete and Frank. The name Joe Pete brought Mabel back to her senses again. They took the better trail back, for the shorter, less-used one was difficult even for an Indian to follow at night. Without a word of farewell they quietly left the group and started for the store. They were some distance from the tent before they dared to speak. Then Mary offered a word of comfort. "Too bad you bring that Lizbet! Medicine man don' like him, that white papoose." Mabel shrugged her shoulder in answer. They went on without other conversation until they reached the store.

Mr. Vargatte was surprised to see them so late at night. He knew that Indian women hated and feared the dark. He knew too that something very much beyond the ordinary had brought them out, but he was as casual as usual with them, and asked for no reasons which they did not voluntarily vouchsafe. He inquired for Joe Pete, as he always did, while he was weighing and wrapping the cornmeal. Mary bought tobacco and examined curiously the various articles on the shelves. A man entered just then, and Mrs. Vargatte, hearing the bell which rang every time a customer opened the door, bustled into the store to wait on him.

A woman followed her from the living room, talking rapidly as though determined that a discussion which had been going on should not be interrupted. Upon seeing who had entered, the woman broke off abruptly, and began to talk with the man in a language which none in the store understood. Her voice was harsh and metallic, and her face somehow seemed to match her



voice. It was pale and hard and shiny. Her eyes shifted here and there as she talked, never once looking directly at the man. They were small, close-set, green-gray eyes, which had an absorbed look in them as if she were adding up long rows of figures and did not want to be disturbed. The man did not once speak to her, though his gaze was fixed on her face. The two Indian women were curious, for they had never seen these people before. Mary looked diffidently over her shoulder at them; then asked Mrs. Vargatte, while the strange woman continued talking, "Who they?"

Volubly Mrs. Vargatte answered, glad to tell these Indian women the news. "The ladee stays just now with me. She is Mademoiselle Marks. She is buying much land for some foreigners who come from some old countree, but I forget the name. The man comes with her to help her buy the land. He himself will buy the first farm. He stays for the time being in the old house left by Monsieur White Loon. I cannot yet say his name."

Then she noticed that Mabel, who had kept aloof, was carrying a baby. Immediately her volatile interest shifted to the child, for she deeply loved children. She even dared to come close to Mabel and ask to look at the baby. Mabel indifferently pulled away the blanket that covered Elizabeth's head, and Mrs. Vargatte exclaimed with pleasure at the real beauty of the baby face. Mabel did not respond. Mrs. Vargatte called her husband to come and look. He was startled at the resemblance of the child to Simpson, but praised the

baby highly. Miss Marks did not look at them. Mrs. Vargatte asked the name of the child. Mabel would not speak, but Mary answered for her, "Lizbet."

"That is a verree pretty name for a verree pretty baby," said Mrs. Vargatte, smiling wistfully at the child as though she had noticed no rebuff. "And is she then the small sister of that so nice child, Joe Pete, who is loved by my own small Armand?" As always, the name Joe Pete softened Mabel. She nodded, smiled, and responded. "One more, too," she said. "One more, too, home. Her name Frank."

There had always been something compelling, something lovable about Mabel's smile. It won an involuntary response from everyone. Now when she smiled and spoke with Mrs. Vargatte, the man who was listening to the strange woman shifted his gaze and stared at Mabel. Delima Vargatte saw the look and shivered. She did not like the man anyway, or trust him. Not because he was a foreigner, but because he was too much like the woman, Miss Marks, who had practically forced herself upon them in spite of Mrs. Vargatte's polite attempts to be rid of her. She had talked a great deal, and Mrs. Vargatte felt—yet without being able to give any tangible reason for feeling so—that there was a hardness amounting to cruelty in her, which would be carried to any extreme that the woman thought necessary to get what she wanted. She did not believe in Miss Mark's affected philanthropy, or in that of the man either.

He was a huge man with large, wild eyes as black

as any Indian's. He had a habit of tossing his head to throw back his long, unkempt hair, which straggled in thick elf-locks over his face and into his eyes. He too talked too much, a constant harangue about things which the simple people in the Settlement did not understand. His views about the government were decidedly queer. He had said to Mr. Vargatte that as soon as he found a good place to farm he was planning to bring his wife and children to the Island and live there. In the meantime he was looking over land, which Miss Marks would buy and sell again later to others of his race who were coming. He had once tried to talk with Jerry when they happened to be in the store together. He introduced himself as Uno Jaakkola and tried to make Jerry think as he did. Jerry had been thoroughly disgusted with him and had called him a "Red." He had told Theophile Vargatte, after Jaakkola left, that he hoped the foreigner would not settle on the Island. He had also told them that Jaakkola was a black Lithuanian. Miss Marks and Jaakkola had been on the Island a month now, and showed no signs of leaving soon. Some of this Mrs. Vargatte tried to explain to Mary and Mabel.

When the two Indian women left the store, Jaakkola turned from Miss Marks and asked Mrs. Vargatte, "Who is that woman?"

Mrs. Vargatte pretended ignorance. "Which?"

"The thin one with the baby," he insisted.

"I do not know the name," she said very politely.

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"There are so many who come into the store that I do not know all the names."

He turned to Vargatte with the same question. "Who is she?" he insisted again. "You wrote her name in your book."

Theophile Vargatte stared at him a long moment. "Her husband's name is Shingoos," he answered slowly. "May I now ask why you wish to know?"

"I just wondered," Jaakkola said vaguely, and began to give his order for groceries. "Do you know what De Longue wants for his south forty?" he asked again, quickly changing the subject, for he had caught the look of distaste which passed between Vargatte and his wife, and Miss Marks had told him that he could not afford at this time to make enemies of these people. "It is good land and I would like to buy it."

"I cannot say," answered Mr. Vargatte, "but he will be in tomorrow when the mailboat returns from the town. You can then see him here in the store. He comes always in for his mail."

"I will," said Jaakkola, and went out.

It was very late. Mrs. Vargatte and Miss Marks returned to the living room. Mr. Vargatte bolted the store door behind Jaakkola, closing for the night, and as he looked out of the big window near the door, imagined that he saw him turn down on the same trail that the women had taken a few minutes earlier. He thought he must be mistaken, for the trail the squaws used went in the opposite direction to the one Jaakkola

used. He said nothing to his wife about it, for she was easily disturbed.

Mabel and Mary walked as quickly as they could at night on a trail which went through thick woods. After they were away from the light of the store for a time, their eyes became accustomed to the blackness and the trail was easier to follow. A pearl gray ground mist began to rise about them, and the night became much colder. They talked little, for they had gone but a short distance when there came over both of them a sickening feeling that something was deliberately following them on the trail. They stopped two or three times and listened, but did not hear a sound. They laughed at themselves for being frightened, but they could not rid their minds of that peculiar certainty that something was stealthily trailing them. Mabel hurried into her cabin and invited Mary to come in and stay with her all night, but Mary refused. Something made Mabel bolt her door securely after Mary left her. Mary was almost afraid to go the half mile farther to her own cabin, but the feeling that she was being followed went from her as soon as she left Mabel's cabin. She decided that they had both been mistaken.

Mabel had been asleep for some time when she was wakened by hearing the latch of the door rattle as it was lifted gently up and down. Startled, she called out loudly, "Who there?" Joe Pete and Frank woke at her call. Frank cried. Joe Pete patted his hands and listened with his mother. Mabel received no answer

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to her query. There was nothing but the silence of the black night. The latch did not move again. She felt that she must have dreamed that it moved, and after a long time went to sleep again. She did not hear the furtive footsteps finally leaving her doorsill, nor see the leer on a cruel face as the foreigner crept from her clearing, thinking to himself, "There is no husband."



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## XI

### J A A K K O L A

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The white plaster which the medicine man gave Mabel seemed to ease her cough, and she felt somewhat better. Her old energy partly came back to her, and she was much encouraged. She saw Jerry passing through her clearing one day on his way to the hunting lodge and hurried out to speak with him. She had not seen him for some time, and now hoped for a pleasant visit with him. He was surprised at her improved appearance and told her so. She was pleased, for Jerry was not in the habit of giving compliments unless he meant them. He inquired about the children and she invited him in to see them. He was in too big a hurry to stop. "I can't," he told her in excuse. "I've got to take a look at the lodge and see that everything is all right. Then I'm going to cut through to the Settlement and go up to town. I'm taking that Miss Marks to town in Vargatte's motor boat and bringing the new teacher back with me. She's Mrs. Vargatte's sister, but they can't get away to meet her today. So I'm going up for them." This was a long speech for Jerry, but her invitation was unprecedented, and he knew that only a satisfactory reason would justify his not accepting it. He was particularly fond of Joe Pete and would have

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liked to see him, but this was an occasion for hurry. He lifted his cap to her and hastened on into the woods.

Jerry had hardly disappeared among the trees when she heard steps approaching her door. She wondered if he might be returning. Then came a sharp rap. She answered it without hesitation. To her amazement there stood the huge, dark man she had seen in the store, and she partly closed the door again. He stood and looked at her, and her first impression was one of intense repulsion. She waited silently. At last he spoke—politely, yet there was an inborn contempt of women in his voice. "Vargatte told me you might direct me to the De Longue farm," he lied.

She shook her head in negation, but he waited. There was a great assurance about him that impressed her. "No. I don' know, me. Go on, this road. You come their farm maybe. I don' know, me." She found herself repeating words foolishly while she gazed fixedly down into those eyes which were black and bottomless. They made her remember the day she had stared into the black water of her own well, thinking it was witch-brew. He continued to stare at her without speaking. Joe Pete ran out under her arm which held the door. The man looked at him, and remembered the episode of the store and her sudden cordiality when this child's name had been mentioned by Mrs. Vargatte. "Nice boy you have there," he said. She smiled and nodded. Jaakkola reached suddenly down, picked Joe Pete up, and held him straight out in front with strong arms. But Joe Pete was too quick

for him. Unexpected as the action of the man had been, Joe Pete was as quick as a striking copperhead to resent treatment which he could not endure. He bent his head and bit deep into one of the wrists that held him. Blood was on his lips as he raised his head and faced Jaakkola defiantly. For just an instant there was death in the eyes of Jaakkola as he looked at Joe Pete. Mabel's hand was on his arm instantly as she reached out for her child, and at her touch Jaakkola became calm, and his eyes emptied of all expression. He dropped Joe Pete swiftly to the ground and wiped the blood from his wrist. The child stood protectingly in front of his mother and faced this man for whom he had conceived a hatred such as he had never before experienced, even toward Charlotte. Mabel attempted a quick explanation, "She don' like nobody touch her, that Joe Pete. She bite."

Jaakkola looked at his wrist more closely. The marks of the teeth were indeed deep. Blood still oozed from the wound. He squeezed it to make the blood flow more freely. After a time he answered her. "I see he does. He will get over that. Yes, he will get over that." His quietness held a menace, and he spoke slowly, almost hesitantly, as though he had to think carefully before he said each English word. Mabel felt again as he spoke that sensation of a power in him that was inevitable, crushing, and cruel. She shook her head doubtfully and repeated, "She bite him, that Joe Pete, if any feller touch her."

"When he knows me better, he will not bite me,"

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Jaakkola answered. Mabel did not reply. She was angry now at herself because she had attempted an excuse to this man for Joe Pete. Let the whites stay away from her cabin. She would not welcome any of them. She pushed Joe Pete gently inside the cabin, then backed in herself, and closed the door. Silently she shot the bolt, and found she was shaking for some reason which she could not understand. Heretofore no woman had even known cause to fear any man who lived on the Island. Yet now she was afraid! She heard slow footsteps die in the distance as Jaakkola went across the clearing and on his way, and noted, even through her disturbance, that he was not following the trail which led to De Longue's farm. Joe Pete came over to her and she held him close. She had had a fright over him. She had seen that look in Jaakkola's eyes as he stared at Joe Pete, and it had seemed to her that she had looked over the End's edge on the Trail of Life into the black chasm of death there. She told the child sharply that he must not bite anyone, no matter who might touch him; but he only put his head into her lap and wept soundlessly. He had been scared too, though he had given the big man look for look, and had maintained his defiance to the end. The sudden, fierce grasp of Jaakkola; the touch which he hated; the peculiar odor which emanated from the man which he also hated; and the unexpected kindness of his mother were all too much for him. He cried as she had never seen him cry before. He could not tell her that part of his fear was the jealous one that she might tolerate

this man whom he hated, as she had tolerated Charlotte. He did not have the words to explain this to her—perhaps did not understand his own feelings. But he was comforted by his mother's tenderness and soon stopped crying.

Mabel held him for a long time, while she tried to make herself believe that she must have been mistaken about the way Jaakkola had looked at the child. No Indian man, unless he were drunk, would have looked at a child so, even though he had been bitten. After a time she almost convinced herself that she had been mistaken, and went on with her work. Frank came up searching for Joe Pete and the two played about the room. Quietness again settled upon them; yet Mabel was uneasy.

Late in the afternoon another knock came. Mabel forced herself to the door and found that it was Big John. Her relief was boundless. Big John came in to see Joe Pete every time he passed the cabin, and he was always welcome. Joe Pete now ran over to his big friend and squeezed close to his knees. Big John talked with him and held his hands close in his. Frank stumbled over to the bench where they were sitting and squeezed close too. Where Joe Pete was, there must he also be. Big John took Frank up on his knee, and Joe Pete laughed with pleasure. "I love you," he said to Big John quietly, yet over and over again, as if the saying of it gave him ease of some trouble. "I love you. You are good to Joe Pete."

Big John looked at Mabel sharply. "What is all

this talk which has come to my small Joe Pete? Have you whipped him?" She hesitated; then decided not to tell him. She was not sure of what she had seen anyway. "No trouble," she answered. "I have not whipped him." But Big John had seen her indecision, and had also noticed her relief when she had seen him at her door. He took the boy on his knees with Frank and hugged him. "My small Joe Pete," he whispered softly, "will you tell Big John?" Joe Pete could not answer, so Big John skillfully brought him back to laughter again.

As they sat laughing and talking, Jaakkola came back through the clearing and came once more to the door. He was smiling and there was not a sign of that look upon him that Mabel had feared. She was now convinced that she had never seen it, that she had been mistaken. He spoke affably to Big John and asked her for a drink of water. He and Big John had evidently met before and had not been friends. Joe Pete drew closer to Big John, and said to him in Indian, "I bit that black man, Big John. I bit him. I do so hate him, and I bit him when he touched me." Big John soothed him. He knew now what the trouble had been.

"What does the boy say?" asked Jaakkola.

"She say she wan' drink too," said Big John smoothly, and gave the dipper to Joe Pete. "Drink, my Joe Pete, drink, and hide what you feel toward this black one," and the child obediently drank. Then holding to Big John's hand he sat close to him, keeping him there in the cabin by force of sheer longing. His little

world had changed this day: he had had his first taste of fear. He was safe while Big John was there; he was sure the black one would not dare to touch him as long as his big friend stayed near. And Big John sensed that Joe Pete needed him desperately, and outstayed Jaakkola.

Finally Jaakkola got up to go. "That was very good water," he said. "I thank you." His large teeth gleamed whitely between his lips as they parted in a smile. He went out. "Good-bye. I will be coming down your road many times and I will stop to drink the good water when I come. The little boy will learn to like me."

When he had gone from the clearing, Big John spoke in English to Mabel so Joe Pete would not so easily understand what they were saying. "Where you see that man?"

She told him that she had first seen him at the store, and that he had come in as he had passed that morning.

"Why Joe Pete bite her?" he asked.

"She touch her quick, and she bite," she replied.

Then Big John spoke to her earnestly. "Don' you let that man come here, Mabel," he warned her. "She's bad man, that one. She's going take all land from Indun, if we don' watch her close, and chase us out of Island. Don' you let her come this place no more. No mans on Island is bad like that black man." He shrugged his shoulders as though he could not put into English just what he would like to say to her. "Don'

you let her come here, Mabel," he repeated warningly. "She's bad, bad man."

"No," she promised, "no. Joe Pete don' like her anyway." Big John got up to go. He searched in all his pockets and Joe Pete's eyes shone. Still Big John searched, looking perplexed, as though he must have lost or mislaid something. Joe Pete could not wait. Finally he came up and thrust one of his hands in the big pocket to help in the search. Then it was that Big John triumphantly pulled from his pocket two sticks of striped candy and gave them to him. "Megwetch! Megwetch!" said Joe Pete joyously, and absolutely forgot any remaining fear. Big John smiled at him as he shared the candy with Frank and offered some to Mabel. Then he had to go. Joe Pete accompanied him to the edge of the woods where Big John told him to return. They looked back at the cabin, starkly outlined against a golden setting sun. But Joe Pete did not see the ugly little hut—he saw only the huge, yellow sun-ball dropping swiftly below the spruces. He drew a long breath of ecstasy and pressed his cheek hard against the hand he held. "Where does he go?" he asked Big John wonderingly. "Where does he go when he falls over the Edge?"

"He thinks to take a shorter trail to the East where he must climb again," Big John laughed, as he explained the setting sun, "but he tangles his feet in the underbrush of the black night woods, and his journey takes him long."

Then he became serious again, and placed his hands gently on the boy's shoulders before letting him go.

"Remember, Joe Pete," he said earnestly, "remember always that Big John is your friend. You are to come to Big John with trouble that grows too big, and Big John will help. Do not forget."

"I will remember, Big John," the child answered him in all seriousness, then ran through the long tree-shadows to the cabin. Big John looked after him until he reached the door. "Our children will have to learn to fight the whites as the whites fight the Indian," he muttered to himself. "My small Joe Pete will become a fighter for his tribe."

Despite Mabel's promise to Big John, Jaakkola came frequently to the cabin. He formed a habit of dropping in when he went by on his land-hunting trips. She lost entirely that first feeling of repulsion toward him, but the child Joe Pete never relaxed his hatred. Jaakkola did not make the mistake of touching him again, but the child kept a safeguard of distance between them. The man brought candy and other bribes. Joe Pete refused to accept them, as instinctively on his guard as animals that unaccountably refuse to take food from certain persons. Mabel reproached him, but her reproofs had no effect on the situation; so she gave it up as hopeless. She had learned that there were a few things that she could not force Joe Pete to do, even though she used her superior strength. In other things he obeyed without question, but in the instances where his deepest instincts were involved she

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was helpless. She could not bring herself to whip him, and she knew that it would be of no avail anyway. In so far as she could, she ignored the attitude he maintained, and allowed Jaakkola to come and go as he pleased, with easy familiarity.

Joe Pete resented Jaakkola's growing intimacy with his mother with a jealous hatred, but he would not beg her to send the man away. He became silent, almost morose, as he had been with Charlotte in the house. Disregarding his feeling, the two grew more intimate during the winter. Jaakkola passed the cabin several times each week, and each time he came in to get warm. He was still looking for some good timber lands that he could procure for himself. He had scoured the Island and knew every acre of the land on it. He was also interested in discovering whether the owners owed any taxes on their lands. Big John repeated his warnings to Mabel and told her she was actually being a traitor to the tribe; Jerry showed open scorn which hurt Mabel more than she let him realize. But in spite of the contempt of the two persons in her world for whom she held the deepest respect, she simply did not possess the power to keep Jaakkola out of her cabin. She resolved firmly to do so each time the men talked with her, but under the strange, compelling gaze of Jaakkola's wild, black eyes, her determination wilted. The men finally relinquished all hope of making her carry out her promise without wavering.

Toward the last of April, when the ice went out of the river, Jaakkola went up to town one day. When

he returned he brought his wife and two children with him, and installed them in the bare little shack which had belonged to White Loon before he died. His wife was a shrinking, tiny woman, with flaxen hair, and was as poorly dressed as any Indian woman on the Island. The children were boys, loutish and stolid. One was twelve and one fourteen, and as soon as they arrived Jaakkola put them to work in the woods. Though the Vargattes hated Jaakkola, and though their distrust of him had constantly grown, they were sorry for his scared little wife, and when she came into the store with her husband they tried to make friends with her. Jaakkola called her Selma. She smiled pathetically at Mrs. Vargatte's advances, but could not talk with her. Neither she nor the boys spoke a word of English. Jaakkola said loudly that he could speak enough English for all of them. He was suave enough, but they could see by the way Selma cringed when he spoke to her, and covered her face with part of her shawl she wore on her head, that he was probably threatening her there before their eyes.

He piled the load of provisions on the counter, told her to carry them home, and left the store. She tried over and over to pile them all in her arms and carry them, but the weight of such a quantity was too much for her limited strength. Knowing Jaakkola as he did, Mr. Vargatte could not offer to help her, for he knew he would only be making the burden heavier for her by adding to it the fierce resentment of her husband. But Mrs. Vargatte had no such compunctions to

hinder her. Jaakkola could have no reason to beat his wife if another woman helped her. She saw a tear trickle down the thin cheek, and such a look of discouragement came over Selma's face that she could bear it no longer. She went over to the frightened, homesick woman and put her arms around her for just a moment. Then quickly she divided the load into two bundles, gave Selma one, and took the other herself. Taking her by the arm, she gently led her out the door and on to her own shack. She did not offer to go in, but tactfully waited outdoors until Selma had deposited her own share and returned to her for the second load. Though Delima Vargatte had known nothing but love and consideration from her husband, and Selma Jaakkola had had nothing but brutal treatment or indifference from hers, there came a perfect understanding between the two women. Selma knew that, as far as she could, Mrs. Vargatte would be her friend. When she turned to go, Selma caught her hand in her own rough ones, held it a moment as though wondering at its soft smoothness, then bent and kissed the palm of it. Mrs. Vargatte hurried away for fear that she would weep.

The fact that his wife and children were now on the Island did not make any change in Jaakkola's habits. He continued to come to Mabel's cabin every time he passed, and as he was something of a night prowler, it was often late when he left. Mabel had heard that his wife had come, but the idea that it should make any difference to either of them, or change their



relationship, never entered her mind. White men went where they pleased. She hit back at Jerry one day by actually laughing at him when he asked her reproachfully if she knew that Selma had come to the Island. At her laugh Jerry's friendly reproof turned to contemptuous disdain. "I only hope that Joe Pete never finds out what a low-down woman you've come to be, Mabel," he said coldly, and left her immediately. His words resurrected a nagging worry that had subconsciously persisted from the time she had first noticed the way Joe Pete had looked at Charlotte, and it frightened her. She determined again not to have anything more to do with Jaakkola; but at his reappearance she looked deep into those mysterious eyes and her vacillating will was overpowered by them. The situation between them remained the same.

Mabel's fourth child came in August. Mary was with her when the child was born, and gave her as much care as she could for a few weeks afterward, for Mabel was again ill for an unusual length of time for an Indian woman. Mary also brought food from the store for them when she went there. Mabel did not have strength enough to walk so far and carry the provisions home again.

This child was a boy. He was not like Mabel's other children. He had a wide face, a nose so short that it was hardly a nose at all, and stubby fingers. Only his eyes and black hair were like his mother's. Both women thought he was an ugly-faced baby, and Mabel wanted to call him Big-Moon-Face. But Mary did not

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like that, so they named him Abraham, after one of Mary's numerous brothers.

Elizabeth fought like a little wild thing when Mary put the baby in her box bed; so Mary took pity on her and fixed another box for Abe. Elizabeth had been walking and running about for a long while, but the old box bed that Dawas had made long ago for Joe Pete had been a refuge for her from the occasional anger of her mother. When things went wrong for Elizabeth, she crawled into her bed and went to sleep. Her hearing had never come, and no one had cared enough for her to attempt to teach her to talk. She made queer, guttural noises for food and water, and a different, but equally queer, noise when she wanted Joe Pete.

She and Frank depended on him every minute of their active hours. Frank could not go out doors unless Joe Pete guided him. Objects seemed to be possessed of a strange ability to get in his path and trip him. He had soon learned to keep away from his mother, after she had given him a few shoves that landed him painfully on the floor; and the little Elizabeth had not been long in learning the same harsh lesson. When she needed food it was from Joe Pete she begged it, and it was Joe Pete who took the trouble to distinguish between her few sounds and try to understand what she wanted. Joe Pete accepted Abraham as he had the others, and Mabel left much of the care of the baby to him. In a few months Abraham was also looking to Joe Pete when he needed attention. Mabel left them

alone in the cabin for increasingly longer stretches while she went to the store or to Mary's cabin to visit.

Because Joe Pete was getting to be a big boy now, Mabel demanded more from him and he was glad to help her. He learned to chop wood and keep up the pile behind the stove. He gathered fallen branches from the near-by woods, and this he loved best of all. Bird songs filled him with exquisite pleasure, and the color and perfume of the forest delighted him. He lost all thought of everyday things once he went into the shelter of the trees.

There was one huge-spreading pine which towered high above the other trees in the woods near the cabin. For some reason this tree had not been cut when the region had been lumbered for its pine long ago. Joe Pete, as though answering an audible call to him, invariably sought out this tree when he went into the woods. It was his own tree. He thought of it in Indian fashion as a person, and his own individuality of thought transformed it into a friendly person. He felt that the big tree knew him, and he was somehow comforted by the feel of its rough bark against his cheek when he was in trouble. Always as soon as he approached he heard the tree rustle, calling him. And always he answered exultantly, "I come, old mighty one!"

He loved to stand under the wide shadow of it, while it whispered to him those far-away tantalizing songs, which, try as he might, he could not understand. Just as he felt that he was about to get the message, he

was disturbed by one of the children needing him or his mother calling to him, and had to go back to his small round of duties.

He lifted heavy pails of water from the well and brought them to the cabin. He washed himself and the other children as well as he could, though he was never very successful at this task. He learned to know the perfume and appearance of sweet-grass, or Indian hay, and gathered great bunches of it for his mother's weaving, picking it patiently and laboriously, blade by blade. He learned everything with a speed and ease that sometimes astonished his mother when she took time to notice him. His childish ways were dropping gradually from him, he began to grow slim and tall, and she depended upon him more and more. Also one trait clung to him; that was his continued loathing for Jaakkola. The year had not changed him in that. Jaakkola did not force the issue, nor was Joe Pete too obvious in his hatred, but both knew that Jaakkola was biding his time, waiting for a chance to break the child's will.

The chance came sooner than either expected, one day when Mabel had gone to the store, leaving Joe Pete in charge. She had only just disappeared down the trail when Jaakkola entered the cabin without knocking. He saw that the children were at last alone and he could have his way. He knew too that he had to work quickly, for he had passed Big John bringing his red cow home from a three-day absence, and knew that he was now not very far behind him. But he

thought it would not take long to teach this Indian child a lesson. He said to Joe Pete, "Where is your mother?"

The child had learned some English, and knew what Jaakkola wanted, but could not bring himself to answer immediately.

"Where is your mother?" the man asked again. Joe Pete had the inborn courtesy of the pure-blood Indian. He answered his enemy, "Store."

"Come here," commanded Jaakkola, and the child realized that the battle had come. "No," he refused quietly.

"I said come here," insisted Jaakkola.

Joe Pete began to tremble, but he stood all the straighter and did not budge from his place. "No," he said again.

Jaakkola came toward him, and as his huge bulk approached menacingly, towering enormously above him, Joe Pete almost screamed. He tightened his lips and held back the cry. The man picked up from the floor a scraped, pliable, willow wand that Mabel had been trying to bend to form a handle for a large basket. He took hold of Joe Pete's wrist. Joe Pete knew beyond all doubt just what the result would be, but it did not deter him from retaliation. Swift as a flash of lightning he bent to the wrist that held him, and though Jaakkola also knew what was coming he could not draw back quickly enough to prevent the small teeth from sinking in his wrist. Again the boy drew blood, but the foreigner did not release him. A trickle of scarlet dripped from the wound as he raised the

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slender stick for the blow. The child winced but did not cry out, though it was the first time he had been struck. Again and again Jaakkola hit him across his shoulders, his legs, and arms. The stick seemed to the child to be cutting into his flesh. He wanted to scream with the pain of the blows, but choked the sound back into his throat.

The repressed sound became a lump in his throat which threatened to suffocate him. His face flamed red, then turned ashy gray. He could with difficulty keep on his feet. Still he would not cry out, though he knew the man would cease his blows then. Frank knew that something was happening, and stumbled about the room in a frenzy of fear, trying to locate the trouble. Elizabeth climbed into the box and hid her face. Joe Pete did not know how much longer he could bear the pain. And it came home to Jaakkola that he was trying to do the impossible, that this was a child like none he had ever dealt with, a child who could be beaten into insensibility but would not make a sign. He stood away and gazed at him, and felt an unwilling admiration for the boy come over him. He dropped the stick. At that moment Frank found Joe Pete, but for once Joe Pete did not respond. He could no longer stand. He was ill, very ill—as much from having endured the touch of the man as from the pain suffered—and he sank to the floor. Frank crouched beside him, holding to him desperately. And just then they heard Big John coming to the door. Immediately Joe Pete struggled to his feet, pulling Frank with him. Big



John came in. "What is wrong?" he asked in Indian to Joe Pete. "What has happened to my Joe Pete?"

"Nothing," answered Joe Pete, as loudly as he could for fear that Big John would hear the beating of his heart. "I had a very queer feeling, and the little Frank was scared. Frank is scared easily because he cannot see, Big John," he tried to explain.

Big John pondered. He turned to Jaakkola, "What the trouble?"

"I do not know," said Jaakkola, taking his cue from the child's evident reply to the big puzzled Indian. "I have but entered."

He looked again at Joe Pete with reluctant admiration, bade him good-bye, then turned and went out. As soon as he had gone Joe Pete took one of Big John's hands and held it to his cheek as though he would never let this friend go again. Big John knew this was a sign that he was bearing some hard load. He noticed that his eyes were closed and that he was shaking pitifully. He gathered him up in his arms as though he were only a baby, and sat down in a chair with him. "Joe Pete, my small Joe Pete! Will you not tell your friend the trouble? What has come to you that Big John does not understand?" Joe Pete put his arms around Big John's neck as though to make up to him for his reticence. He tried to tell him how much he loved him, but that spontaneous expression of his babyhood would not come. He had come into his heritage, the silence of the Indian. "I cannot tell, Big John.

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Joe Pete was not a coward. Joe Pete was afraid, but he was not a coward!"

"What did the black man do, Joe Pete? Did he have to do with this trouble?"

"Do not ask, Big John. I cannot tell. Some day when I am big I shall—I shall—kill—" And in his brown eyes his hatred for the foreigner blazed.

But Big John would not listen. "Hush, my small one. Do not say it. There are other ways now. The Indian may not kill a white. He must use white men's ways to fight white men. Wait your time, Joe Pete, and we will plan the way for you. I do not see the plan yet, but the time for it will come. Wait!"

Together they sat, and Big John's hopes for his race ran high. Only a five-year-old was Joe Pete, but he was a true Indian, a stoic, no tale-bearer; with such a child belonging to it the tribe might yet attain the goal Big John held in view for it. What might Joe Pete not do? They sat there quietly and happily until Mabel returned.

She saw the red cow tethered to a tree and knew that Big John was within. She dreaded seeing him, for he had been decidedly reproachful for a long time. But finally she entered and saw them sitting in the chair. Joe Pete was almost asleep, and Big John's head was nodding. He had had a long tramp after the red cow—even to the upper end of the Island—and he was tired. He spoke kindly to Mabel when she came in. He could forgive her anything because she had given

such a child as Joe Pete to the tribe. There was not another like him. She was glad of the truce between them and wasted no time guessing as to the reason for it. Big John put the boy down and went away. He wondered just how much Joe Pete would explain to Mabel the thing he could not tell Big John.

But Joe Pete did not confide in his mother. When he winced if he moved quickly and she looked at him searchingly, he offered no explanation, and she did not press him for one. This one episode had changed their relations toward each other. He had had his first cruel experience with life, and his babyhood had succumbed under the strenuous demands of the occasion. Already he had begun to apply those rudiments of the Indian philosophy of life which had been imbedded within him. This contention was between himself and Jaakkola. If it were right that his mother should be informed of it, the knowledge would come to her in time, but not through his telling her of it.

When Jaakkola came again there was no change in Mabel's attitude toward him. He knew from this that the boy had not told her, though he had everything to gain by the telling. His admiration of the child grew, but it did not lessen the hatred felt by each toward the other. Nor did it decrease Jaakkola's determination to break the pride and then the will of this aloof child who defied him. Joe Pete, as well as Jaakkola, knew that the battle between them had but just begun.

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## XII

### JOE PETE GOES TO SCHOOL

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In September of the next year came the day that Joe Pete had patiently waited and longed for. It was the first day of the school term. One of his dreams had come awake: he was actually going to school.

Some weeks earlier Big John had dropped in, as he always did when he had any reason for passing the cabin, and had talked with Mabel about sending Joe Pete to school. Big John had not thought particularly about why he so insistently wanted Joe Pete to go—that was to come to him later—but he knew that the boy wanted to go, and he had decided that for once Joe Pete was to have what he wanted. Mabel did not intend to allow Joe Pete to attend school at all. She told Big John that she needed him at home. He simply must stay home or she could not weave baskets. Rather dramatically she pointed at Frank, Elizabeth, and Abe, and told Big John that Joe Pete's work was there, taking care of them. She thought this would end the discussion, but he knew that this was not the real reason for her objection.

Joe Pete said nothing. He had long ago discovered the uselessness of trying to plead with his mother. Big John looked into his longing, wistful eyes, and nodded

to himself. The boy wanted to go, and he should go. Then he told Joe Pete to take the other children and run out for a few minutes while he talked with Mabel; for Big John had a native tact, an innate dislike of hurting the inner depths of a soul. He knew that he must hurt Mabel—the child came first with him—but he would not do it before the children. They had been sent from the house so many times on flimsy excuses that they went now without thought of being spared any unpleasantness. Only Joe Pete thought about it, because instinctively he knew that his big friend was fighting for something that he wanted—the chance to learn.

This was exactly what Big John was doing, and in so doing he was overstepping the Indian creed of non-interference in another's family affairs, while he was forcing Mabel to do as he wished. In the cabin was being fought a battle that was to mean much to the child. Big John did not spare Mabel, though his voice remained gentle and even, the words soft and slow. He pictured her to herself unmercifully, just as she must appear to those in the Settlement; true to his type mentioning the unmentionable without a quiver. He had tried to tell her of the pleasure Joe Pete would have at school, and the advantage it would be to the tribe to have such a child educated as the whites were educated. But Mabel had sat with closed eyes, and to all his arguments had muttered, "Kawin! No! No!" When nothing else moved her, he finally was forced to use the only resource left to him. He threatened to

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report her to the Law, and have the boy taken away from her.

Mabel knew Big John could, and would, do this thing he threatened. She knew that underneath all his kindness and generosity, his sympathy, and gentleness, lay a hard, determined purpose. He would not hesitate to use white men's ways if Indian methods failed. At first she was stunned by his persistence; then she flashed into anger. She argued and pleaded; she threatened. She called him all the foul epithets that one Indian can pour out upon another Indian who betrays a member of the tribe, but never did she disclose in words to him the true reason for wishing to keep the child close to her.

Big John sat silent, apparently unhurt. His face remained serene, though her words were cutting him deeper than his had hurt her. She was hitting at his deepest instinct—loyalty to the tribe no matter what the provocation might be to turn traitor. He was so still and withdrawn that she finally realized that she might more successfully plead with the spruce trees at her door. With that realization she fell silent again. The two sat without a word. Not even their eyes betrayed their thoughts. A long time they sat thus, then, as though spitting out a mouthful of spoiled meat, Mabel spat out at Big John, "Ver' good. She can go, that Joe Pete."

When Big John called the child to him and told him the decision, the sudden, swift, shy joy that flamed into Joe Pete's eyes made the big, tender-hearted Indian



smile with delight. He patted him on the shoulder as gently as another child might, glanced back to where Mabel stood sulkily glaring at them from the doorway, and with every word giving Joe Pete the sensation of a warm handclasp, he said quietly, "You're damn' fine feller, Joe Pete." Then he turned and without another word or glance took the trail homeward.

He left behind in the clearing a grateful, wondering little boy, who stared long after him, even when the branches had ceased swaying from Big John's violent passage through them.

But now the day had come. Joe Pete woke with the gray dawn, like any other happy child. Until the others should wake, he would hold his joy quietly, pondering over it, as he always did with sensations that were new to him. The words "damn' fine feller" came back to him. He said them over and over happily, and they warmed him like a shaft of strong sunlight. He looked at Frank, white and delicate; Frank, whose slender, seeing fingers twitched even in sleep as though he used them to see with in his dreams; Frank, who stumbled and fell unless Joe Pete were near to protect him from inanimate enemies; yet who saw colors and heard tones never seen or heard by Joe Pete.

Cuddled close between Frank and Abe for warmth lay Elizabeth. Her face was as lovely as the picture of Saint Mary in the church in the Settlement, and her hair was the color of the shining copper wire which Jerry carried in his pocket. Yet presently she would

waken like a small animal, and make animal noises for food. And Abe! The small, baby body and impish round face tugged at Joe Pete's heart. In Abe's closed fist he saw Frank's treasured mouth organ. He must see that it was returned to Frank before he went to school. Abe could find many other things for the pleasure of his little thievish hands, but what would Frank do without the solace of his mouth organ! As he looked at them lovingly he wondered why Big John had not patted them also, and why he had not called them "damn' fine fellers." Turning this over and over in his active mind, and coming to no conclusion, he waited for more than an hour.

The glow of the rising sun shone through the window. The others did not waken. Joe Pete could not wait another minute. He moved soundlessly. His lithe, naked body held a hundred beautiful poses in the dust-filled shaft of sunlight, as he looked over the miscellaneous assortment of rag-tag clothes which were part of his mother's basket wages. He chose a man-sized blue shirt and a pair of trousers which would cover his bare legs to the ankles. They were ragged and dirty, but he donned them, his joy not one whit lessened by his poverty. Gently he disengaged Abe's small, clasping fingers from the mouth organ. Frank was sleeping in his clothes, for he chilled more easily than the others. Joe Pete slipped the mouth organ inside Frank's blouse without waking him. Silently he stole out of the house. He did not know what time this school began, but when it opened he would be there.

He followed the dew-covered trail, accompanied by myriad early-morning bird songs, which he was for once too excited to hear. When he reached the low, log schoolhouse, there was no one there. He sat down on the door sill to wait. Again his dreams enfolded him. A little green snake wriggled out from under the old log walls. Startled at sight of him, it coiled and thrust its forked tongue rapidly in and out like a tiny flash of scarlet, wrathful lightning. Joe Pete sat unseeing and, like a living green thread, the snake uncoiled again and wound away over the stones. A red squirrel wondered just what Joe Pete might be, and came close to see. Out of the corners of his eyes he watched it come nearer, until it was almost within reach. He moved his fingers. Like a flash it climbed to the roof of the schoolhouse, from which point of safety it looked over the edge and scolded him raucously for its fright. Joe Pete smiled.

Time went by. A boy wandered slowly into view. He was almost as dark as Joe Pete, but his hair was rather long and curly and he was fat from over-many sweets. Joe Pete knew at once that this was Armand, son of Theophile Vargatte. He had seen this boy two or three times when he had gone to the store with his mother, and each time, though they had not spoken, the boy had smiled at him. Now Armand came up and sat down on the door sill with Joe Pete. "What's your name?" said he, grinning.

Joe Pete told him.

"Where do you live?" came next.

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Joe Pete told him that too. Armand had never been back so far from the river.

"Where's your lunch?" was his next question.

Poor Joe Pete! He had had no breakfast and had not thought about lunch. "I don't need none, me," he answered, with none of his inner trembling showing. Armand's brown eyes opened wide, and he stared hard at Joe Pete. What kind of boy was this who did not need to eat? Joe Pete stared back. This was the first white boy who had ever talked with him. As they looked at each other a sudden impulse of friendship and understanding flashed from one to the other—one of those quickly formed bonds of child friendship which so often hold unbroken through the years. "You're coming to my house for dinner," said Armand positively, and Joe Pete knew that he would. Though he had been as shy as any wild thing about entering a house which was not his own, he knew he would go gladly with this boy.

The teacher came and unlocked the door. She was the same Miss Delaramie, the younger sister of Mrs. Vargatte, whom Jerry had met in town three years before. She was a graduate of a normal school in southern Michigan and had come to the Island to get teaching experience in preparation for work in a city school. She had become so interested in the children that she had never left for the city again. Everyone hoped that she never would. The children knew her thoroughly after those three years and were no longer shy with her.

The school opened with twelve enrolled. They were French and Indian children. Four of them were Big John's children, and Joe Pete was delighted to see Jennie there, for he was very fond of her. She was sitting alone in a double seat, so he went over and sat with her. Armand told them all who Joe Pete was, and they accepted him immediately as one of them and included him in the games at recess. They all spoke Indian, French, and a ready, though broken, English. Joe Pete listened to them and felt quite at ease. His English was quite as good as theirs.

When the first class was called, Miss Delaramie asked him if he had his books with him. He had not known that he had to have books, and expected to be sent home. His eyes showed fear as he looked rather pitifully at Armand, and Armand came speedily to the rescue of his new friend. He offered to lend Joe Pete the books that he had used in the first grade the year before. Joe Pete's heart filled with a love for this kindly, generous Armand that was little short of adoration.

At noon, true to his promise, Armand took him home. Miss Delaramie went with them, and they talked about strange things on the way—things that Joe Pete had never heard about. Mrs. Vargatte looked somewhat askance at Joe Pete's dirty clothes. Armand would never outgrow his "so funny" ways. He was always bringing someone, or something, home with him. She sputtered at him—all as a matter of course—and Joe Pete sensed that underneath all her fussing, the love between these two was very deep. She called Ar-

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mand "Mon Petite," and he thought it was a pleasant name indeed for Armand. Her house, her food, and her kindness were a revelation to the Indian boy. Armand, seeing his astonishment, showed him through the house and store. In his wildest dreams Joe Pete had never imagined such comfort and cleanliness as he saw in the simple home of the Vargattes.

Mrs. Vargatte questioned him adroitly about his own home, and his straightforward answers—when he felt that he could answer—pleased her. Mabel's reputation was not generally known in the Settlement, but Mrs. Vargatte knew much about her and felt sorry for her and her children. His answers to her questions assured her that he knew nothing about, or else did not comprehend, the situation in his home. She looked questioningly at Theophile across the table and he nodded. So she told Joe Pete he was to eat with them each noon. A new world opened to him with those words and her kindnesses.

That afternoon he learned his first printed words, C-A-T, R-A-T, F-A-T, M-A-T—a whole long list of them. They meant little to him, but he was immensely proud and happy. Miss Delaramie smiled at him and told him he was a good boy. School was just what he had dreamed it would be.

On the way homeward he unconsciously braced himself for his mother's questions, but there were none. The already shortening September day went out in a glory of crimson and gold as he neared the clearing. Joe Pete, happily and without regret, watched the end



of his first unmarred day. Another day was coming—many days—and with each one would come school, and Armand, his good friend. His happiness was almost too much. The joy of the day lasted while he performed the tasks his silent mother set for him. He talked to Frank and Abe until they went to sleep. Elizabeth came close to them as they talked, her wistful, uncomprehending eyes watching their every gesture. She climbed up on the bed after the others had fallen asleep and stretched out her arms to Joe Pete. He lay down beside her, and her little hands patted his cheek. All at once he realized how intolerably she had missed him, and quickly he rubbed his soft cheek against hers. It was an unusual demonstration of affection from either. She gave a low sound of content and closed her eyes. As Joe Pete stared into the dark he dreamed—just like any other small boy—of the nice things he would some day buy for her: a doll, some red candy, some dresses—some—

He was asleep, all unconscious that his mother sat in the dusk for a long while and watched, as she had done at his birth, a ray of new moonlight illumine his small body lying on the same bed. Mabel did not try to explain to herself the queer feeling that came over her as she gazed at him, but it was the crystallizing of that old fear that she would some day lose him. A late white-throat called out a broken, sleepy flute note. It emphasized her loneliness.

A knock came on the door. She knew Jaakkola wanted her, but she did not respond. For the moment

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she bitterly hated all whites, Jaakkola included. They had taken everything. Now they would take the only thing on earth she cared for. Joe Pete would hold with the new ways, the new white friends; he would come to hate her—

Another knock. She sat motionless, holding her breath for fear she would cough. Slow footsteps left her door sill and died in the distance.

The last moon ray lingered over the fine face of Joe Pete. There was a great love in her face as she looked at him. Fairly wrung from her quivering mouth came the words: "By God, she's fine feller, that Joe Pete!"

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### XIII

## NOKOMIS

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Every day Joe Pete hurried home from school. He did not want to hurry, for he loved this school that became more interesting each time he went; but he knew intuitively that his mother was pleased when she saw him running home. Though she seemed to become more silent and aloof as he grew older, he sensed the fact that she really loved him more than she did the other children. He realized too that as her fear of losing him increased she became more reserved with him, as if she were preparing herself to do without him. He wanted to tell her that he would never leave her as long as she needed him, but his inherited Indian reticence would not let him. So he began to show his loyalty to her in the only way he could—by hurrying from the place he loved best back home to help her as much as he could.

Because of this need for haste it was a great trouble to him that first day that the Old Woman—who was his great grandmother—stepped out from the woods with her heavy basket of herbs and all too slowly climbed the hill with him, stopping often to rest. He wished to run fast and leave her behind, but she called to him, “Wait, Joe Pete. Nokomis would climb the

hill with thee!" Always he waited until the stumbling Old Woman caught up with him again, and with patience past his years, listened to her mumblings as she climbed the hill beside him. When she left him at the in-trail to her small hut at the top of the hill, he ran as fast as he could to make up the lost time, arriving home panting and breathless, but late. Mabel's keen eyes noted his condition, and she believed he did not want to come home. Joe Pete understood her thoughts, but the silence between them was seldom broken now by explanation. He tried, but could not tell her.

Each day it seemed to him that the Old Woman became a little slower, and each day he was a little later arriving home. Then came the day when he had to help her all the long way up the hill, when it seemed that in spite of his small, valiant efforts they would never reach the in-trail to her hut at the top of the hill. He was very late that night, and his mother's gloomy eyes never left him. He went to bed worried, and wondered why it was that there had arisen this strange difficulty of explanation between them—wondered, but accepted it. He was too young and too much an Indian child to do anything else.

He hardly expected to meet the Old Woman the next day, but as he neared the hill he saw her sitting by the side of the trail, her head bowed on her thin, feeble arms. He might have passed by her easily enough without her hearing him. But he went over to her and called her, "Nokomis! Joe Pete is here." She looked at him and her eyes were dazed, as though she were

seeing him through a thick haze. The large veins in her hands stood out like taut, blue ropes. Joe Pete could feel the ridges of them as he helped her to her feet and started with her up the endless hill. It seemed to him that hours passed while they strove there and the top of the hill came no closer. Every tottering step the Old Woman took was with painful difficulty. Constantly she called to him in a thin, moaning, far-away voice, "Do not wait for old Nokomis, Joe Pete. She is weary and would rest a little. She will follow soon." But, much as he wanted to, he could not bear to leave her. She leaned more and more heavily upon him until her weight became too great, and he led her to a small grassy mound to rest. Her tired, misshapen feet slid woodenly out from under her and she fell against the mound even as he tried to seat her there. Her breath came in hard, heavy gasps as though she had run a long race and were exceedingly weary.

He let her rest until the sun sank to a certain point on the hill. Then he knew that he must waken her. He softly called close to her ear, "Nokomis! Nokomis!", but there was no answer. He sat and watched the sun sink lower, and a great fear that he had never known before stalked out of the darkening woods and set him shivering there by the side of the mound.

He tried hard to control himself. A partridge walked slowly across the trail. He watched every movement of it until it disappeared in the woods shadows. There was not a sound now to break the stillness but the hard breathing of the Old Woman. The shadows grew

longer and seemed to stretch long fingers out toward the mound on which they sat. He clenched his hands. He felt a sudden, irresistible impulse to run away from that half-tangible something which drew closer and closer with the shadows. He felt that he could not bear the terror of this thing that he could not see. He rose to his feet and stood poised for flight, yet hesitant. As if his movement had disturbed her, the Old Woman spoke, "Go home, little Joe Pete, Nokomis—will—follow—soon—"

Instantly he sat down again by her side. The fear was still there, but he would not leave her. She needed him, and she was so old, so helpless! As steadily as he could, for his lips were trembling, he answered, "No, old Nokomis, Joe Pete will wait for you. Rest yet a little longer."

The sun dropped behind the hill. Joe Pete and the Old Woman were in a deep, long, suddenly cold shadow. High above them was a glory of color. He watched the quickly changing beauty of it, loving it wildly, and almost forgot the fear. As the light slowly died, the breathing of the Old Woman seemed to become easier, until he could not hear it at all. She must be rested. He wondered if he might waken her now and begin again the struggle up the hill.

"Nokomis," he called gently. There was no answer. He leaned over her, patted her shoulder, and called louder, "Nokomis! Nokomis!" She did not waken. Then instinctively he knew that the Old Woman would never answer again. Unquestionably the fear had gone



too, and he knew she would not be afraid, alone now on the grassy mound.

He left her there by the side of the trail. Slowly he went home. Mabel was waiting at the door, but when she saw him coming, lagging, she went inside and closed the door. Joe Pete, for all his gallant six years, stood before that closed door with twitching face and drooping shoulders. Almost he turned and ran to his friends in the Settlement. He thought of Mrs. Vargatte's crooning voice and was sorely hurt with longing for the comforting sound of it. But somehow Joe Pete could not run away. With a supreme effort of childish will he pushed the door open and entered the room. His mother sat with her back toward him. She did not turn or speak. The children were asleep. He straightened his shoulders as though shaking off this sense of desolation which gripped him and walked over to where his mother sat, staring at nothing. He put his hand on her shoulder. "Mother," he called, from some unplumbed depth of him which sadly needed comfort, "Mother." Mabel turned. "Mother," said Joe Pete, and his voice broke into sobs, "the Old Nokomis is dead!"

Understanding came into Mabel's eyes, softening them to those eyes which Joe Pete had once known. A miracle happened in that dark, mean cabin. Her arms went around him and drew him fiercely close. His head drooped and fitted into a warm place on her shoulder. Her cheek pressed hard against his. Neither spoke. But Joe Pete knew with a content that was be-

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yond words that love was there for him, and she knew that Joe Pete would not leave her as long as she wanted him to stay.

Forgotten was the Old Woman beside the long hill. Night prowlers wandered curiously about her and passed on.

Then came those master spinners, the spiders. Back and forth they trailed their silken threads in an intricate weaving, surpassingly delicate. They worked until the first light of the dawning day tightened their woof. And the Old Woman, who had left Youth and Vanity behind her with the years, was beautiful in her dew-spangled shroud.

Big John found her so when he passed in the morning, looking for his red cow which was always straying.

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#### XIV

#### ELIZABETH

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For the next three years Joe Pete went regularly to school. If he happened to miss a day he felt lost and wandered restlessly around the cabin, though his presence there at home was a treat to the other children. School had become a necessity to his happiness. Big John made him a small pair of snowshoes so that no matter how high the snow drifts piled up, the child had a chance to get through. His mother seemed to have given up her objections to his going, and that relieved his mind. He enjoyed the contact with the other children in the school, and through Miss Delaramie's wise planning they had splendid times together.

Jerry had told her something of Joe Pete, also something of the conditions under which he lived; and she had been especially kind and considerate to him. He had repaid her kindness by making such progress that there were times when she was amazed at his rapid advancement in knowledge. All the children in the school were older than their years in certain kinds of crude wisdom. They were shrewd, poised, and reserved, for with the exception of Armand—and perhaps the four Big John children—they all had had to look out for themselves at an age when white children were still

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having the tenderest care. Coming from homes where all family life was lived without privacy—or what the white man would call modesty—in one room, there were few facts about adult life which they did not know as a matter of course. Miss Delaramie had had to modify all her previous ideas of school teaching and what might be expected from children of a given age. She found that she had to overlook much of what these children said and did, little by little instilling in them a sense of decency and personal cleanliness.

Mrs. Vargatte continued her kindness to Joe Pete. He still ate his lunch with them at noon. Mabel had never once thought of giving him anything to eat during the day. The friendship between Armand and Joe Pete had grown deep and unselfish. They would have shared anything they owned with each other. The Vargattes were pleased at this attachment between the two and did all they could to foster it. They felt that Joe Pete had much to give Armand, who in turn could do much for Joe Pete.

It had been hard at first to have a dirty, unmannered child in the house as an intimate friend of their child, but Joe Pete had shrewdly watched the behavior of Armand at the table and had copied him in everything he did. Through her sympathetic correction of Armand's faults Mrs. Vargatte had indirectly accomplished much in the way of modifying Joe Pete's actions also. When they saw how quickly he improved and how intensely eager he was to do things as decently as they did, they became very fond of him. Yet, even

with the Vargattes, there was a definite limit to the familiarity they could attain with the child. He loved them as he loved Big John and Jerry, and keenly appreciated their goodness to him, yet there was an aloofness about him which even those who loved him best could not penetrate. There was a certain confidence and intimacy that he could give them; then his pride rose up and they realized they would lose that confidence if they persisted in questioning or even in forcing a friendship upon him. When he did seem to be familiar with them it was as though a wild bird had poised in its flight long enough to let them stroke its wings. In his own way Joe Pete was gradually working out his own code and adjusting it to the conditions he encountered. Even Big John, who understood him better than anyone and was closer to him than his mother, did not plumb the depths of him. There were days when Miss Delaramie thought discouragedly that she had not reached him at all.

Jerry had cultivated a habit of dropping into the schoolhouse when he passed by. There were times when Jerry hated the woods with a great, weary hatred, yet he could not exist away from them. Because he had never met a woman who would share the kind of life he lived in the camps, he had never married. He had discovered that he had much to give Miss Delaramie in information about the children and that she was interested in all that he could tell her of the Island folk. Though she met many of them in the store, they looked upon her as a stranger and would not talk with

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her beyond a casual greeting. It was Jerry who told her about Frank and Elizabeth one day when he had been trying vainly to reason with Mabel, and he wondered if she might be able to do anything for them in school. So Miss Delaramie asked Joe Pete to bring the two younger children with him to school some day when the weather was fit. Joe Pete looked at her for a long moment; then concluded she must know about their condition or she would not have spoken to him about them. He told her he would bring them if his mother would consent.

The experiment was not successful. Elizabeth was suspicious and afraid, and refused to budge from the cabin at all. Joe Pete could not entice her. Frank was more trustful and went with Joe Pete, but he was so sensitive to every strange sound and was so shaken nervously with the strangeness and strain of the experience that he could not sleep at night and wept continuously. Mabel was angry at being kept awake with his crying and refused to let him go again. When Miss Delaramie saw that Joe Pete was distressed about it all, she did not press the matter.

But in spite of her scared, obstinate refusal to go with Joe Pete to school, Elizabeth missed him intolerably. All the endlessly long days that he was away, three-year-old Abe, freed from Joe Pete's restraining hand and influence, teased and tormented Frank and Elizabeth almost beyond endurance. His impish wits knew what tortured these two sensitive ones most, and his ingenuity was childishly fiendish. Mabel never in-



terfered, either to punish or reward. She was the typical Indian mother, even with Joe Pete whom she loved. With these unwanted, half-breed waifs it had developed into a situation where it was the survival of the strongest, and she was too dull and indifferent to care whether they survived at all. So in self-defense Elizabeth had learned many hiding places, one after the other, where she hid herself as does a hunted baby animal, until Abe found them, one by one also, and drove her forth to new search.

Joe Pete knew nothing of all this. Elizabeth could not tell him, and if he had known there was nothing he could have done. The children behaved fairly well when he was with them, and he supposed they did the same when they were with his mother. But each day Elizabeth became a little more driven and desperate. She began to follow Joe Pete down the trail in the mornings when he went to school, always keeping just out of his sight for fear he would send her back home again. She went as far as she dared—to what seemed to her to be an enormous distance—then reluctantly turned toward home again. When she came to a secluded nook which seemed unlikely to be discovered by Abe, she hid herself, returning home only when her hunger became more unendurable than her dislike of Abe. Her mother grew accustomed to her long absences.

On one of these trips after the unwitting Joe Pete she followed him as far as the Bog. The Bog was a deep, shining circular pool in the woods near the trail

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to the Settlement. No one could explain the cause of its existence there. One stepped from firm earth down unexpectedly into slimy, bottomless ooze. Occasional bubbles of air rose from the depths and pushed their slow way up to the surface of the water, where they broke and sent out ever-widening ripple-rings to the shore. A large white stone slab projected far out over the edge of the pool, and lying on this slab one could gaze deep down into the black water which mirrored every leaf and moving cloud above, intensifying their beauty and color.

It had been a long walk for Elizabeth. She was hot and tired, and she was very thirsty. She saw the glitter of the pool and knew that here was water just like that they got out of the hole in the box over the well at home. She had never looked down into their well because she was not tall enough to see over the edge of the box, but the water which Joe Pete pulled up from it was shining, like this in the Bog.

She left the trail and went down to the pool. Her only idea in going was to quench her thirst. But as she went closer to the shimmering Bog her quick, eager eyes saw things which interested her. Butterflies fluttered among the shrubs which grew along the firm ground close to the Bog. A tall, blue heron stalked uncertainly along and hesitated at the edge of the water searching for food. Green-blue dragon flies darted swiftly in erratic circles above the surface of the water; birds lighted fearlessly on the thick lily pads floating on the bubble waves, and drank in dainty

mouthfuls; and wild ducks whistled through the air in lightning flight as she approached. It was a lovely place, an enchanted pool for a lonely child.

The white stone slab attracted her to it. The shadow of an elm fell upon it. It looked cool, and as though it were a comfortable place to sit. She carefully picked her way through the reeds and cat-tails until she reached the stone and feasted her eyes upon these living wild-things which seemed unaware of her there among them. She wished she could come to this place every day, for she was sure that Abe could never find her here.

The minutes passed all unheeded by the little girl who sat in blissful content on the white stone slab, just watching. The sun, as it climbed higher into the morning sky, seemed to focus all its light on the stone. The child abruptly realized that she was still very hot and very thirsty. She thought she would get a drink and then go over under the tall trees, where cool breezes always hid themselves away in the dimness.

She stretched herself flat on the stone and slid out over the edge until she could look straight down into the pool. She saw the leaves and clouds reflected there. It was like looking into another world. She leaned farther over and reached down toward the water—then drew back startled. Wonder of wonders! She had seen down in the pool a little girl stretching out her hand to her. She sat almost motionless, breathless, waiting for the little girl's face to appear above the edge of the stone. She forgot her thirst in her intense

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excitement. After a long wait she timidly leaned over the stone again. It was true! There was the little girl, and she was staring at Elizabeth with big brown eyes that were startled and shy. Did she want Elizabeth to come down and play with her? The small, fretted Elizabeth suddenly wanted to play with that friendly little girl more than she had ever wanted anything in her life.

Once more she stretched her arm toward the pool. She had forgotten the heat, the water, everything but the little girl who was straining her arm toward Elizabeth. She leaned farther over the stone—the little girl came closer, and their hands, outstretched to each other, almost touched. So near they came that Elizabeth smiled and put out both arms. So did the other little girl! Oh, the little girl did want to play, for there she was smiling also at Elizabeth—Elizabeth, who had never known another little girl's smile.

She made a wilder effort to reach the hands of the little girl. She leaned far, far over the edge of the stone. Ah, too far over! There was a sudden splash of slimy water. The hands of the two smiling little girls met! Elizabeth was surprised to feel the other small hands so cool and wet. . . .

Mabel would not believe that anything had happened to Elizabeth and refused to become excited about her failure to come home at mealtime. Joe Pete hunted the woods until it grew so dark that he could no longer see. Then he became frantic and ran to Big John for help

in the search. Jerry was there talking with Big John at his cabin, and his first thought was of the Bog. He had told Big John many times that they should build a strong fence around the treacherous pool. Many cows had been mired there and once in a while a deer. The two men tried to reassure Joe Pete and advised him to go home and leave the search to them, but he would not go. The idea of Elizabeth wandering around in the woods, scared and hungry, was enough to keep him searching all night.

The men took lanterns and started out. Jerry gruffly said to Big John, "Better bring one of your longest pike-poles." They stopped in at Mabel's cabin just long enough to ask her which direction Elizabeth had taken in the morning. Mabel did not know. Jerry looked at Big John and shook his head. They went immediately to the Bog. The small footprints were easily followed through the reeds and cat-tails as far as the stone. The men saw there were no tracks leading away again and knew what had happened.

They took turns carrying the dripping little figure home. Joe Pete followed. He was dazed and stupid, and stumbled dizzily as he walked. He could not figure out the why of it all. Jerry wished he would cry.

They buried Elizabeth on the secret, hidden, burial mound where the Ojibway tribe had buried their dead for many generations. Jerry had often heard that there was such a place, and though it seemed to him that he had walked over every inch of the Island dur-

ing his many years there, it was the first time he had ever seen it. Joe Pete had never been there before either. A narrow path, which looked as though it would lead nowhere, branched off the well-beaten trail which crossed the Island. But after they had walked about fifty feet Jerry discovered that it was a well-defined trail with the huge stones rolled to the side to make passage easier. Suddenly they came to the mound, rising abruptly in a perfect oval from the end of the path. They climbed the steep, slippery-clay ascent with difficulty. But when they reached the top of the mound Jerry thought he had never seen so beautiful a spot, and wondered why he had never happened to find it long ago.

Higher than the tops of the maples surrounding and hiding it, the mound stood, bathed in warm, yellow sunlight. Fragrant winds swept over it, and the earth was matted with small woods-flowers. There was nothing on this mound to depress the most sensitive with a feeling of death. Isolated from the world, it seemed to Jerry that there was a peacefulness on this mound that he had never felt before. He tried not to talk. He knew that he was there only on sufferance because he had always befriended Elizabeth, but he could not refrain from speech with Big John. The two stood alone after Mabel and Mary had gone, looking far over the green-spreading tips of tall trees to the blue-green lake in the distance. The noise of the whirling pin-wheels and the soft whipping of colored cloths that decorated the Indian graves were the only sounds to be



heard. Jerry drew a deep breath and spoke: "I tell you, Big John, a man wouldn't mind dying and leaving it all if he could rest forever in a place so near the sky as this is."

Big John did not seem to resent Jerry's speaking, though he only smiled and did not answer. He did not even ask Jerry not to tell about the mound, and Jerry appreciated his trust in him. Joe Pete looked at all the curious offerings on the graves. He stopped at the grave of a child and noticed some small toy dishes on it. Then he looked at the little mound of earth under which Elizabeth lay. His throat tightened. Elizabeth had had no favorite toys which he could send with her on her lone trail. Slowly he took from his pocket a treasured, colored button which Mrs. Vargatte had given him, and placed it on the mound. Jerry's eyes met those of Big John, and for once there was no barrier to the flash of wordless understanding that passed between Indian and white man.

"Come, my small Joe Pete," said Big John quietly. The men and the boy went down the side of the mound again and joined the women. Jerry noticed that they did not return directly on the little path to the main trail, but separated and came out of the woods in different places.

Mabel did not ask either Jerry or Mr. Vargatte to write to Simpson. The ten dollars came as usual every month to pay for the maintenance of Elizabeth. The red-headed luck was working for Mabel and she was quite content. After a few days Joe Pete was the only one who remembered Elizabeth.

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## XV

### THE GHOST INDIAN

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The year following the death of Elizabeth was an eventful one for the Indians on the Island. They dated many of their events from this year. Two unusual happenings took place. In June word first came that Sam Shegahg was out of prison and had returned to his old home, only to find that the foreigner had bought up the tax title on his land and intended to hold it unless Sam paid—which was only another way of saying that Jaakkola owned it, for Sam could never pay taxes which had run for ten years. The news of his release traveled rapidly down river from island to island and finally reached Charlotte, wherever she was, and she hastened to come to meet Sam again. Jaakkola had kept Sam from the old home until he could repay the tax money, so he was staying at Big John's. Charlotte came once more to Mabel's cabin where she could be near her brother until they could decide whether they would accept the small sum Jaakkola offered them for a quit-claim to their land. Mabel did not want her at her house but, as before, she could not refuse shelter to her.

Sam had changed for the worse during his term in prison. He had become even more silent and secretive,

and added to this was now a hardness that was the very essence of cruelty. He had become a dangerous as well as a vicious man. Even the Indians who knew him best were diffident with him. Jerry and Mr. Vargatte considered him a direct menace to every white on the Island. They knew that he would try to retaliate in some underhand way for his imprisonment. They almost envied Jaakkola his seeming careless indifference to Sam's very probable retribution. It did not enter their minds for a moment that this foreigner was indifferent because he did not yet understand the Indian nature, which never forgets an injury, nor realize that there might be an attempt at retaliation.

One warm night in July Big John walked into the Settlement store where Jerry and Theophile Vargatte were talking and smoking companionably, and surprised them with a further bit of news. He told them that Jaakkola had gone into partnership with Wilson, and that the two men were hiring all the Indians who would work for them. Wilson owned two hundred acres of the best virgin timberland remaining on the Island. It was when Jerry had been sent by his company to look over this stand of timber and offer Wilson a price for it, that he had seen Wilson's abused child-wife Sara and had felt sorry for her. Wilson had with abrupt finality refused to sell the land to Jerry's company, but had not had money enough to finance the logging of it until Jaakkola produced the necessary amount from some mysterious source which he never divulged, though everybody suspected that Miss Marks had loaned it.

Big John said that he knew of thirty Indians they had already hired and that they wanted ten more. Jaakkola was offering them higher wages than Jerry could afford to give. This would cripple Jerry's operations in the woods that winter, for he had always used as many Indian lumberjacks as he could.

Then Big John gave them his best bit of gossip, which he had saved for the last. He grinned at the two white men, for whom he had a profound respect and whom he considered his best friends, and said with very evident anticipatory pleasure, "An' what you think? That black Jaakkola have hire that Sam!"

Jerry stared at him incredulously. "You don't mean the 'Ghost Indian'?"

"Yes," said Big John, and his grin grew, "she have hire that Sam Shegahg."

"You surely must have made a mistake, Big John, or someone told you wrong," insisted Jerry, and a slow grin came upon his face also. "Jaakkola is not a damn fool."

"If he is not the fool, he is then taking the long chance," added Mr. Vargatte slowly, and the others knew just what he meant.

But Big John said positively that he had not been misinformed, and the very next day Vargatte found out that the big Indian was right. Sam came into the store and told him he was going to be chore boy at Wilson's camp, and wanted some tobacco on credit. Mr. Vargatte tried to talk with him as he waited on him, but Sam would give him no further information

about himself or his plans. There was something implacable and ugly in his attitude that Mr. Vargatte could scarcely tolerate, in spite of his sympathy with him because of the loss of his old home to Jaakkola. While Mr. Vargatte waited on another customer Sam took his tobacco and slipped silently out of the store.

In August Jaakkola asked Mabel if she and Charlotte would cook for the new camp. He told her she might bring the children with her, for they were building a new camp and the sleeping quarters at one end of the cook building could be made large enough to accommodate the two women and the three children. She did not want to go, but she had become so accustomed to doing as Jaakkola wanted that she could not refuse him. There were many advantages about cooking in the camp as well as the money she got in wages. Jaakkola surmised that Charlotte would not do her fair share of the work, but he hired her thinking it would create a better feeling toward him among the Indians by doing so. He had invested much borrowed money in this deal with Wilson, and he could not afford to take any chance.

When Mabel told Joe Pete where they were going, his first thought was that he could not go to school, and he was miserable. He knew too how desperately he would miss Armand. But he would not plead with his mother, knowing it would be useless. Armand would get far ahead of him in the class, but he consoled himself by thinking that when he came back he could catch up with him again. When he went to the store on

the last day before they were to go and told Armand, that loyal friend was so indignant that he wept. Joe Pete did not know what to say to console him, but he did know that he could not bear to hear Armand crying. Mrs. Vargatte had to comfort her son and tell him that he must be a man, that the time would soon pass and Joe Pete would be back again. Before Joe Pete left the store Armand gave him one of his most treasured possessions as a parting gift, a worn copy of *Robinson Crusoe* full of brightly colored pictures. Joe Pete thanked him and took the homeward trail sadly. Both boys knew that no one could take the place of the other, no matter what new friends they might make. Once more Armand stood on the stoop and watched Joe Pete climb the hill and vanish from sight. And once again Joe Pete climbed and never once looked back at Armand.

In September the camp crew had completed the buildings, and the women moved into their quarters in the cook camp. This was a more pretentious camp than Jerry's had been. There were five or six good, substantial buildings. Wilson still lived in his own shack, and Jaakkola stayed with him there when he happened to be in camp over night. The cook camp was large, clean, and fragrant with the odor of new lumber. One end of it was separate from the rest of the room, and the women and children slept there as in the camp on the Dogomain. There was a huge log camp where the men slept in hay-filled bunks built in rows against the walls. There were also the big barn and the black-



smith shop; the office and van were in Wilson's shanty. Joe Pete and Frank were everywhere, investigating their new environment with open curiosity. There were forty men working in camp, and many of these Joe Pete did not know.

The cutting was started early in the season. As soon as the trees were felled they were cut up into logs, and the logs were skidded up into rollways, where they would be easy to reach and load when the snow became deep enough to make good sledding. Joe Pete gave his mother as much help as she demanded and then spent the rest of his time in the woods, watching the men and talking with them when they were eating their noon meal. He loved to be out in the thick timber, and the men liked him because he did not get in the way or make himself obnoxious by having to be told to keep out of dangerous places. Every day he watched the piles of logs on the rollways become higher. The men were cutting close and taking all kinds of timber. Wilson kept close watch on the work, but Jaakkola came only occasionally. Miss Marks had been harrying him about the farm lands he was to procure for her, and he was busy investigating tax titles of the better property held by the Indians.

The whites of the community had always been lenient with the Indians about their taxes. If they failed to pay them, the land went back to the government, but the Indians still lived on the land without realizing, or caring, that it did not any longer belong to them. The time when Indians of this section were

actively abused by the whites had passed. The abuse of the Indian by the modern white lay in the neglect of his welfare. The town would have actively resented outsiders' exploiting the Island Indians, who were never ousted because of their failure to pay taxes. The whites felt that the Indians had always lived on the Island—now let them have it. No white would take it from them. It was poor land for farming, but it happened to be the kind of climate and the type of soil to which these people of Jaakkola's race were accustomed and knew best how to work. Neither Jaakkola nor Miss Marks had any scruples about driving the Indians from an Island that had been theirs for generations. Without any of the city officials really understanding just what Jaakkola was doing, he had bought up tax titles to the best lands, and had discovered what Indian lands had gone back to the government and could be taken up again in homesteads. Much less did any of the Indians suspect any secret land deals.

Two months passed in the woods, and the men had not been paid. The snow was deep and the logs should be hauled to the banking grounds on the shore, there to lie until a tug came in the spring and rafted them out. The Indians talked it over and refused to work at hauling until they had their money. Sam was the spokesman for the crew. Wilson gave them one month's wages and told them the remainder would soon be paid. Sam told him they all needed socks, mackinaws, and other warm woods-clothes. Wilson agreed

to let them have what they needed from the van—the camp store. The men were all dissatisfied, but Wilson finally persuaded them that they could wait now until the cut was finished and hauled to the banking grounds, and then get their wages all at once. It was a disgruntled lot of men who went back to their work in the woods, and Sam was constantly wandering about among them fostering their dissatisfaction with the situation. When Wilson discovered what Sam was doing, he talked it over with Jaakkola, and they both decided that the time had come when they must discharge him. This they did, and put an Indian named Jim Joseph in his place.

With Jim's taking over Sam's job, there occurred an episode which threatened to disrupt the camp. Jim was a shiftless Indian, and his work was only half done. He left the men's sleeping camp in such filthy condition that the men threatened to leave. They could not find another man to take Jim's place. Jaakkola suggested to Mabel that she should take charge of the men's camp. This was the first time she refused to do anything he asked of her, but the terrific odor of unwashed, snow-wet socks hung over the hot stove to dry for the next day made her ill. Then Jaakkola insisted that Joe Pete was big enough to sweep the floor and make up the bunks, but Mabel stood out against that. Finally they compromised by getting old Jane Poker as extra help, and it became her duty to clean the men's camp. Odors did not bother old Jane: Mabel often wondered if anything did. But the fact

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that she had refused to allow Joe Pete to do the work that Jaakkola demanded made him realize that she still cared more for the child than she did for him. This made him furiously ugly, and his hatred of Joe Pete became more stubborn than it had been. Now he felt that he had a motive for his vengeance, and at every opportunity he vented his spite on the child, making his life unhappy whenever he was around the camp. The men sensed this feeling of Jaakkola's against the boy and were kinder to him because of it.

Jaakkola began at this time to know a queer experience, the fear of another man. Never had he known physical fear of anyone. But he began to realize that Sam hated him, and though Sam was not so large as Jaakkola, there was something uncanny about his cold hate which made Jaakkola's flesh creep. Sam had renewed his habit of appearing from nowhere and disappearing again just as silently and completely, which habit had long ago earned for him his name of Ghost Indian from the whites. The foreigner ceased his night prowling. Two or three times when he had been going home at night from the camp, he had felt that someone was walking beside him and, looking quickly, had seen Sam accompanying him. He had not known when he first approached. Silently Sam trailed with him for a mile or two, then as suddenly left him again, going so quietly that Jaakkola did not know just when he had gone, merging into the forest blackness like a deeper shadow. Jaakkola tried to talk with him on these night walks, but Sam would not answer. Then

Jaakkola became possessed with the notion that he was being followed by Sam when the Ghost Indian was not anywhere near him, and kept his hand on the keen knife which he wore so conveniently in his belt that he could pull it from its open case instantaneously. Even with his weapon, however, he was conscious of fear and gave up his nocturnal jaunts. A knife was of little use against a man who came and went like a shadow.

Jaakkola was not the only man who was beginning to feel that Sam's presence was a menace. Wilson had the same experience. Sam had liked and been good to Sara, the child whom Wilson had virtually bought from her mother, though Jane knew, and Wilson also, that Sam and Sara were planning to live together some day when Sara was a little older. Sam cursed old Jane with unspeakable epithets whenever he happened to meet her, but she went on as fearless and unconcerned about him as though she had not heard. Again Mabel wondered if nothing bothered old Jane Poker! It was not so with Wilson. When he met Sam on the woods trails he was somehow forced to feel that a living, accusing Sara stood between them, and he wished that he had never let Jaakkola talk him into hiring Sam at all. Discharging him had not solved the problem of discipline among the men, but had only made matters worse. He was now free to circulate among the men and keep them constantly stirred up. Wilson grew more careful, and walked cautiously through the forest, keeping a constant, alert watch upon his surroundings. Only once did Sam speak with him when he silently

appeared from nowhere one day; and then only because the sudden sight of Wilson sent his wrath flaming out of all control.

"Why you whip Sara?" he questioned. "Why you whip him? He's good girl and don' wan' whippings!"

Wilson lost his temper and shouted back, "She was *not* a good girl! Her lying mother said she was a worker, but she was a lazy little devil!"

Sam did not answer this—just looked at Wilson. But the man knew that Sam knew he was lying about the dead girl, and he felt his face grow yellow-green under the menace glinting openly in those black, half-insane eyes. He could not defend himself further while those eyes were fixed on him.

The blacksmith was an old Irishman named Mahoney, who made Joe Pete think of a knotted tangle of cedar roots which he had once seen his mother try to un-snarl for her weaving. He was a friend of Wilson's and probed about, trying to find out for him what the men were thinking and planning with Sam. He always welcomed Joe Pete when he and Frank were out of doors, and asked him many questions that seemed very queer to him. But as usual when anyone tried to catechize Joe Pete, he withdrew behind his barrier of aloofness and told nothing. There was no Big John or Jerry near to tell him what to do, and he could not confide in his mother. He realized now that she would not care if she did know that Jaakkola was trying to defraud the Indians.

Sam overheard Mahoney questioning Joe Pete one

day and listened to hear what the child replied. He grinned when Joe Pete would not answer, or answered evasively. He knew that the boy had heard much of the talk among the men as he followed them through the woods, and could easily have betrayed them. His secrecy pleased Sam. Joe Pete never knew that Sam had overheard, for he crept away as softly as he had come, but the next time Sam came to the camp he brought a light ash sled that he had made and with a grin presented it to Joe Pete. Joe Pete had never seen Sam smile, and did not know why he was pleased with him. But he was very glad to have the sled and thanked Sam with sincere gratitude. The sled made it so easy to take Frank outdoors for a while. Sam could not have done anything that would have given the children more pleasure, and it was the beginning of a queer bond between the pariah Indian and the boy. Whenever Joe Pete caught a glimpse of Sam he always went to meet him and talked with him as gravely as an adult. Mabel often wondered why Joe Pete liked Sam and hated Charlotte, but she realized, since the day she had come home and found Big John's restive red cow tethered to a tree near her door and Big John holding Joe Pete sleepily close, that Joe Pete had had many experiences which he had not confided to her. Nor would she have respected him so highly if he had.

The winter passed and the situation was no better between Wilson and the men. There was no open disruption, but there were many irritating incidents which were very unpleasant. In Jerry's camps this would

never have been allowed to reach such proportions before he would have discussed it frankly with his Indians, but Wilson and Jaakkola would not talk. They insisted that the men would be paid when the logs were out, and rather than lose what they had already earned the men stuck the winter out.

Finally the logs were all hauled to the banking grounds on the shore. Wilson and Jaakkola had estimated the winter's cut at nearly two million feet. They were expecting the man—sent by the company which was buying the lumber—any day to measure the logs. The men overheard Wilson tell Mahoney that he was going to town and headed by Sam they went to his shack. Wilson would not answer when they called to him, so they opened the door and entered. He faced them like a cornered rat, but Sam spoke to him quietly, almost suavely, "You go town tomorrow?"

"I'm planning on going, just for the day," answered Wilson.

"Why you don' pay us?" Sam asked.

"I've got to go up to the bank and get the money," said Wilson. "I just got a letter saying it was there."

"When we get him, that money?" asked Joseph.

"Now I'll tell you fellows. I'll be back here with it in three days. The man'll come in two days to measure, and the next day I'll come down with the money. You fellows can wait a little longer."

"We wait t'ree day. Then we don' wait longer," said Sam, and the other men agreed.

"That'll be fine, boys," answered Wilson. "In three days you'll have your pay."

The next day Wilson went to town. In spite of their distrust of him the men had to accept his word that he would return with the money he owed them. Jaakkola came to camp just after Wilson left, and seemed surprised when Jim Joseph told him that Wilson had gone to town for money. He looked worried also, but as he thought about it he seemed easier in his mind.

"You fellows do not need to worry," he told them. "He will not have the money until the man has paid him for the logs. I will see to it you have your wages."

The men knew Jaakkola had financed the building of the camps and their first month's wages, so they felt sure he would claim his share of the profits. Wilson would not get away with anything. They became more contented. Jaakkola was sure that Wilson had only gone to town because he was afraid of Sam.

So the men waited. It was three days before Graham, the man sent by the lumber company, arrived. He told Jaakkola that they had too much cull stuff in the piles and seemed dissatisfied. He returned to town immediately after finishing his estimate. The men were fair to Wilson and waited three days longer. Mahoney seemed to be as anxious as the others. He talked continually about the fix he would be in if things did not turn out well. For the time all the men—except Sam—accepted him as one with them. He continued to question Joe Pete as to what he heard the men talking about, but Joe Pete did not reply. He

had noticed that after talking with him or Jim Joseph, Mahoney usually went to the cook camp where Jaakkola was visiting with Mabel. Then the two men would go into the office and continue their talk where no one could hear them. Joe Pete became suspicious of Mahoney.

After three days Sam laid his plans before the men. They would wait one more day and then set fire to the logs on the banking grounds. They had already waited longer than the time agreed upon, and he was sure now that Wilson intended to cheat them in some way out of their money. He was not sure whether Jaakkola was in with Wilson on his scheme or not, but he suspected him of it. They talked about their plan late at night after Jaakkola had gone home and Mahoney was in his bunk. They decided to take no chances and Sam warned them not to let any inkling of their intention leak out. A speedy motor boat could get to town and back in three hours with officers enough to prevent their carrying out the scheme if it became known.

The next day there hung over the lumber camp a tense watchfulness. The men were quiet spoken and appeared unexcited, but there was a purpose behind their waiting. All day they waited, but Wilson did not come with their wages. At dusk they raided the cook camp and the office and helped themselves to all the machine oil on hand, also grease, kerosene, and some gasoline that they found in one small building where such supplies were kept. Each man carried a great load.

Charlotte, old Jane, and Mabel followed. Frank and Abe were in bed, and Mabel told Joe Pete to stay with them until she returned; but after they had all gone he slowly followed them. He knew that some scheme was being carried out and he was curious to see what it was. Jim Joseph was the only man who did not go. He had been drinking all afternoon and was too unsteady on his feet to take part. Mahoney spoke with him a few moments as the other men were starting away from camp; then set out as fast as he could travel for Jaakkola's hut. Jim Joseph tried to persuade him to remain, but Mahoney swore at him and hurried faster. Jim lay down on one of the bunks and slept.

It was two miles from the lumber camp to the banking grounds. Joe Pete arrived long after the others and hid behind an upturned stump close to the water's edge. The men poured their oil and gasoline over the piles of logs. They smeared the grease on thickly where it would most easily feed the fire; over all they poured kerosene. Charlotte was so excited that she broke into a soft evil chant, but the men silenced her quickly. Then Sam Shegahg, muttering wildly to himself, went down the row of log piles and set them afire, and to the onlookers he seemed to be the very spirit of flame. As he passed Joe Pete heard the words, "For Sara! For Sara!" but did not understand whom Sam meant by these words which were almost like an incantation. Many of the logs were gummy, and the oil started the flames leaping swiftly. One pile did not catch fire. The men gathered in a group there and tried to light it, but it did not burn. In an hour or so

the flames were creeping to the tops of the other piles, and the surrounding forest was as light as day. Birds were disturbed by the intense light and called protestingly. Red squirrels chattered in dismay, then scurried off. It was a destructive but beautiful sight when all the logs caught and burst into flame wings, sending clouds of scintillating red sparks swinging up into the black night sky. The men stood as close as they could and watched. Joe Pete recognized all of them in the light. The heat was terrific. Joe Pete sweated in his hiding place but did not dare to move lest they discover him. The noise of the crackling flames was like the sound of thousands of giant rockets set off at once. Mabel and Charlotte and even old Jane laughed nervously. They could not help wondering what would be the outcome of it all. It was long since they had openly shown their resentment against the white man, and this was an ecstasy of retaliation.

Then they heard the steady hum of Mr. Vargatte's speed boat, the noise of it carrying far over the water and sounding even above the intermittent crackling of the fire. Sam hurried to each group of men, calling in Indian, "Run! Run! Make for your own homes!" In less than a minute there was no one but Sam to be seen. The women hurried toward the camp. No one could question them or fasten any blame on them if they were not seen at the place. Joe Pete watched them all going and he wanted to run too, but Sam was there, watching from behind a tree the approaching motor boat. He was forced to remain where he was. When the boat touched the shore Jaakkola and three other

men stepped out of it, and Joe Pete saw Sam vanish like a woods wraith behind the trees. One of the men spoke, "She's gone! No hopes of saving a stick!"

"I knew as soon as we saw the light in the sky that she was some fire," said another one.

The third man, a large man dressed in a blue suit, added, "I don't think there is a chance of catching them. And if we did catch some of them we can't prove that they did it. Nobody saw them." It was evident that this was a continuation of a conversation that had been going on.

Jaakkola flared out at him. "Cannot prove it, Sheriff MacDonald! Did not Jim Joseph tell our man Mahoney they were going to do it?"

The sheriff spoke again. "That's all right, Jaakkola. You may prove that a drunken Indian said they were going to do it, but who *saw* them do it?"

At that Jaakkola forgot himself and broke out at him, cursing.

"Shut up, Jaakkola," said MacDonald. Then to the other men, "Let's look around a bit."

The three men came directly toward Joe Pete's hiding place. He saw they could not help stumbling almost over him. Rather than be caught hiding, he stepped out into the light of the fire. The man nearest started back. "Who's this, for the luvva Mike!"

Jaakkola grinned and his teeth shone white between his lips.

"It is that Indian boy, Joe Pete. Now we have a witness!"

MacDonald looked at Jaakkola as though he did not like the tone of the remark. "He's only a kid," he said. "What does he know about it?"

Jaakkola laughed. "You evidently do not know the Indian," he said. "He is a child, maybe, but he is many years older than your white children of the same age. He can tell us what we want to know."

MacDonald called Joe Pete to him, "Come here, boy!" The child came obediently and fearlessly to him. "What do you know about this fire, Joe Pete?" asked the sheriff.

Joe Pete did not answer, but he felt that strange tightening of his throat. He wondered if Sam might be watching from the woods and come to help him.

"Do you understand what I am saying?" asked MacDonald again.

Joe Pete nodded.

"Then tell me if you know who set this fire," said MacDonald, and his voice held a persuasive note.

Again Joe Pete nodded.

"Good," said MacDonald. "Tell us who did it."

Then Joe Pete answered, "I can't tell, me." Surely if Sam were seeing what was happening he would come to his rescue.

"Oh, come now," persisted MacDonald, "be a good boy and tell who started the fire. Just tell us who lighted it—and I'll give you this dollar." He pulled a silver dollar out of his pocket and held it toward Joe Pete.

Joe Pete repeated, "I can't tell, me." He looked

again toward the woods. But Sam did not come. The sheriff saw his glance. He turned to the other men. "Search the woods," he commanded. "I think some of them are watching us."

Jaakkola went with the men, and while they searched, the sheriff drew the child down upon the ground beside him. The light from the fire glowed over them as they sat there. MacDonald reached into his pocket again and placed the dollar down on the earth beside Joe Pete. Joe Pete looked straight at him and shook his head. MacDonald took out another dollar and placed it beside the first. There was no response from the boy. Again the sheriff added to his bribe until there were six dollars shining on the sand. It was more money than the child had ever seen. He closed his eyes. This man was being kind to him and he would have liked to please him. He also wanted the money, but he could not tell that these Indians who had been so kind to him all winter had set the logs afire. MacDonald patted him on the shoulder and somehow Joe Pete did not resent the touch. "Never mind, kid," he heard him say, "don't get sick over it. We'll find out some other way."

The men returned to the fire without having found a trace of anyone in the woods. Jaakkola asked fiercely, "Did Joe Pete tell you?"

MacDonald looked at him. "No," he said slowly, "he didn't tell. He is only a child. He can't be more than nine or ten years old. He is too young to come under the Law."

"Let me talk with him alone," suggested Jaakkola. "I know him and maybe he will tell me."

"Try if you want to," said MacDonald. "We'll take another look around while you're trying."

The men walked off into the woods and Joe Pete knew that the struggle between himself and the foreigner would again be fought. Jaakkola waited until the men were out of sight and then grasped the boy with cruel fingers which dug deep into his shoulders. Like a flash Joe Pete bent to his wrist and bit him. Once again Jaakkola's blood was on his lips when he raised his head. This time Jaakkola struck him brutally across the face. Again and again he hit, and each time the mark of his fingers showed red on the child's flesh. As often as he was able Joe Pete bit him, but his strength was puny and useless against that of the man who hated him. Between blows Jaakkola said to him, "Will you tell? Will you tell? Will you tell?" over and over, until the phrase wore on the child's nerves. He closed his lips tight so that the answer could not escape him. It was ten minutes before the sheriff returned and Joe Pete bore the bitter pain of those ten minutes and did not betray his tribe. Again Jaakkola knew that reluctant admiration for the strength of this child whom he could not break. It was the kind of strength that Jaakkola knew that he himself did not possess.

MacDonald sauntered up to them. "Did he tell you?" he asked. Then he looked at the boy, and turned in a rage toward Jaakkola. "If you have beaten

him up, I'll take you along back with me tomorrow," he threatened. He turned to Joe Pete. "Did he hurt you?" Joe Pete looked straight at him and shook his head. He could not speak.

MacDonald swung around again to Jaakkola. "I think the kid is lying," he said. "And let me tell you right now just what I think of this whole business. You and Wilson have been doing something crooked or these Indians wouldn't have burned your logs. They've lived here on this Island for years and this is the first time I've ever heard of their acting up. I'll take the kid back to camp with me and stay all night there. In the morning I'll see what I can find out about the affair." He took Joe Pete's hand, reached into his pocket, pulled out one of the dollars he had tried to bribe him with, and slipped it into the hand he held. "There, Joe Pete," he said, loud enough for Jaakkola to hear, "that's because you didn't tell!"

Jaakkola sat down on a chunk of log and dropped his head in his arms. The two men, MacDonald, and Joe Pete went on to the camp and left him there. For the first time in his life Joe Pete went willingly hand-in-hand with a stranger. As he stumbled wearily over the rough logging road he decided that at his first opportunity he would tell Sam that there were some good whites. There were Jerry, Mr. Vargatte, Mrs. Vargatte, and Armand; and now this man who had given him a dollar because he had refused to do the very thing the man had asked him to do. He thought about this all the way home, and his thinking became more

muddled each moment. He was glad when MacDonald knocked at the door of the cook camp, where there was yet a light showing, and turned him over to his mother. MacDonald asked Mabel where they could sleep for the night and she routed Jim Joseph, now sober, from his bunk to provide for them. She did not reprove Joe Pete for leaving the children alone. She seemed to know what had happened to him. After he was in his small bunk, she leaned down to him and pressed her cheek against his. He knew that she was proud of him for some reason. Content in that knowledge he fell asleep.

Jaakkola looked up to find Sam standing staring at him. When Sam saw that he was aroused, he struck him twice across the face. "Damn devil white man! Indun fix you this time!" Sam muttered at him. Jaakkola sprang to his feet and pulled out his knife ready to attack the Indian. But, like the thing for which he was named, Sam, the Ghost Indian, melted into the woods. Jaakkola heard an ugly laugh, then came the words, "If you touch ever again that Joe Pete, if you hurt her again, you be sorry!" Jaakkola stood staring as though he had lost his wits. There was no other sound than the snapping heaps of coals. Then Jaakkola groaned. He had lost all he had put into this deal with Wilson. They were waiting for the report of their representative, and the logs were gone! He and Wilson had both lost out. Cursing like a madman he strode into the woods toward home.

XVI

THE WHITE LAMB MARBLE

After a long time—in fact near the end of the following summer—the furore about the fire died out. Nothing was ever proved against the Indians. Jaakkola swore that MacDonald did not push the case as he should have done, but they were actually unable to produce witnesses who could swear that the Indians had burned the logs. MacDonald remained on the Island for more than a week without finding one clue. They suspected, but they could not prove their suspicions. Joe Pete was questioned repeatedly, but he would not tell what he knew. There was no way to force him to tell, and the sheriff finally came to the conclusion that the boy really did not know much about it, that he had just happened along when the logs were burning. During the week MacDonald remained on the Island he had seen a great deal of the child, and had grown to like him and also to admire his high courage, for he was quite sure that Jaakkola had beaten the boy to force him to tell what he knew. He did not hesitate to praise Joe Pete to Big John and others with whom he happened to talk. Big John glowed at this praise of Joe Pete, and was so pleasant and help-

ful to this man who represented the Law, that MacDonald left with the fixed idea that the Indians were a pretty decent lot after all. The Indians felt the same way about MacDonald. The tale of Joe Pete's refusal to tell the sheriff the name of the man who had set fire to the logs spread quietly over the entire Island; also the story of the beating he had endured from Jaakkola rather than betray Sam. None knew where the story came from, nor who started it on its travels; but it spread from group to group, even to the islands farther down the river. The few whites who lived on the Island knew and respected their Indian neighbors, and felt that Wilson and Jaakkola deserved their loss for trying to trick the Indians out of their wages. They also resented foreigners like Jaakkola coming in and stirring up trouble where none had existed before. The Indians laughed silently to themselves and made no comments. But to the whole tribe Joe Pete came to be marked as the boy who would do something for the tribe when the time was right.

Joe Pete was unaware of all this. He never knew that Sam had covertly retreated but a short distance into the woods shadows on the night of the fire, remaining just out of range of the flickering light, but watching intently all that occurred. He had not interfered, for though he half liked Joe Pete, he was perfectly willing to let him suffer while he stood by and watched the testing of him. The result had pleased him beyond anything that had happened to him for years, and it was Sam who sent the news over the Island that the tribe

had in Joe Pete a child who would in time win for it from the whites its former land rights. Mabel seemed to be the only person who had not heard about the testing of the child. She did know about the questioning, for she had seen and heard those fail who had attempted to probe into her boy's mind. No one told her about the other. Sam was too disgusted and enraged at her for having anything further to do with Jaakkola to tell her before he went down river to work in another camp; and the others did not, for various reasons. She suspected that something had happened, but she was becoming too indifferent to question those who could tell her.

Jerry and Mr. Vargatte heard about it and gently quizzed Big John when he came into the store. He replied only with a pleased smile; but understanding him and that smile, they were fully answered, and their already sincere respect for the boy increased immensely. They had no sympathy with Wilson and Jaakkola, and laughed to themselves over the fact that Jaakkola, who had no respect or love for the law, had run to it for protection at the first sign of danger. When Joe Pete came into the store a few days later to buy some groceries for his mother, Mr. Vargatte stopped him after he had waited on him and talked with him. "How old are you now, Joe Pete?" he began.

Joe Pete looked at him questioningly, even a trifle suspiciously. He had been asked that question so often lately!

"I'm 'leven years, me," he finally answered.

"Are you then going again to school in the fall?" Vargatte asked again.

"Yes, yes," the child answered impetuously, as though he were afraid he was not going and must reassure himself.

"That is all I wanted to know," said Mr. Vargatte. "I am the director of the school who must get the janitor for this year. I am wondering if you would like to have the job."

Joe Pete stared and could not answer. He only half believed this offer could be true. Mr. Vargatte talked on, giving him a chance to recover. He understood the boy as few others did. "It is not such hard work," he said easily. "The fire must be built early enough in the morning so the room will be warm when the children come. It must be swept every day and mopped once every month. The pay is small though—only a dollar each week."

Joe Pete was figuring. A dollar each week was four dollars every month. What things he could buy with four dollars!

"Young John has been doing the work so far, but he is tired of such small wages when he is no longer going to the school. He wants to go to the camp where he will get more than I can pay him for helping me in the store."

Joe Pete did not wait for Mr. Vargatte to say anything more. He knew all about the ambitions of Young John at first hand. He had heard Big John say that this was the last winter for Young John on the Island,

for Young John wanted to get away from it and was planning to go sailing in the spring after the work in the camps had closed. Quickly Joe Pete accepted the job and ran all the way home to tell his mother about it. She was quite willing to have him take it, but did not share his pleasure.

So all that winter Joe Pete went to school earlier than any of the others and had the room warm for them when they came. The work itself was not hard, for after the snow came there was very little dirt tracked in by the children, and the sweeping was not difficult. But there were many mornings when he dreaded facing the bitter cold and the deep snow, yet had to start out while it was still dark. He made his way through blizzards so fierce that he and Armand were the only children who could come through it. Many mornings he built the fire with fingers so numbed that he could scarcely hold the match which was to light it. His clothes were insufficient against the bitterness of the weather, and many times he could have cried with discouragement. Yet something within him forced him to go on with the thing he had started. Always too he encouraged himself by thinking of the four dollars and the help it was to his mother. Her fingers had stiffened in the cold weather and she was unable to weave. All they had that they could absolutely depend upon was the ten dollars they received from Simpson each month, eked out by the four dollars which were Joe Pete's addition. Mabel needed this extra money to keep them from starving, for Joe Pete, Frank, and

Abe were growing big, and needed an ever-increasing amount of food to nourish their rapidly developing bodies. Mrs. Vargatte had renewed her invitation to Joe Pete to eat his lunch with Armand at noon. This helped out more than he realized, for she always planned a hot, appetizing meal for them.

In spite of the extra money and Mrs. Vargatte's kindness, Joe Pete became thin and almost gaunt. His mother had become unobserving and never seemed to notice that he took food from his own plate and gave it to the other two boys when they did not have enough. He asked Big John to show him how to make snares to catch rabbits, which were plentiful about their clearing. Big John was delighted to explain to him how they were made, and the most likely places for him to set them. The rabbit meat was wearisome and not as welcome as the fish given to them occasionally by those who lived on the shore, but it helped out their meager diet.

Frank was ill constantly during the winter, and between his suffering, his mother's neglect, and the constant teasing of Abe, his was an unhappy existence. There were days when even though he was very hungry he could not eat the kind of food they had, and Joe Pete was very anxious about him. He told Mrs. Vargatte about it one day when he had become rather desperate after Frank had been unable to eat for four days, and she sent something to the blind boy which she thought he would like. After this first time she did it often. Frank always ate ravenously what she sent,

and Joe Pete's gratitude to Mrs. Vargatte grew to be an idealistic reverence for her.

Thus the long northern winter passed again, and spring came, bringing warmth and relief to all of them. And with the coming of spring there happened another event in the life of Joe Pete which was to put his childhood forever behind him.

It was a gray day. It had rained continuously and every time the children came in from out of doors they brought on their feet great chunks of soft, clinging mud which dropped off on the floor. When it became dry in the warmth of the room it crumbled under their scuffling feet, heaped up in little piles under the desks, and was tracked into every corner of the school. Joe Pete looked with deeper dismay at each fresh chunk brought in. It seemed an impossible task to clean that floor, and his mother had asked him to hurry home. Miss Delaramie sensed his dismay. She had offered to help him many times in numberless ways, but he had firmly yet courteously refused each offer. She had finally come to realize the uselessness of any obvious attempt to make things easier for this sensitive, aloof Indian boy whom she had grown to respect and love more than any other child in the school. She was quite sure that Joe Pete liked her, but in spite of this fact she never seemed to be able to reach the inner depths of him, or lead him openly to betray any emotion. In situations where a white child laughed or wept, this Indian boy merely smiled or was stoically silent. She was forced to be content with what she could only suspect was

hidden behind his inscrutable eyes, and did not realize the struggle that Joe Pete went through every day just to keep himself from becoming soft and weak under her kindness. In self-defense he had had to set up a barrier between them. He knew that if ever he only once surrendered to these kind, friendly whites, he would find his home utterly unbearable. He had come to appreciate and desire the finer things that these friends of his represented, but according to his carefully worked out childish creed he must assist his mother and help with the other children to the limit of his ability. Therefore he would not make that situation more intolerable than it was by allowing himself to need kindness. The only way in which Miss Delaramie could help him was by leaving the building as soon as the children went, thus giving him a chance to get at his work sooner. This she had done every night since he had started to do the janitor work.

Tonight the sweeping was just as hard as Joe Pete had expected. He gathered up dustpan after dustpan full of mud, yet the floor did not look clean. The air was thick with dust, which floated above his head in visible waves, almost strangling him. It settled on the desks, the seats, and on Miss Delaramie's beautiful story books standing in a short, precious row on her desk. Somehow he did not like to see the dust fall on those books. It seemed to him out of keeping with the beauty which was contained in them; especially the two books which contained the stories he loved. One of these had smooth, black leather covers, velvet-soft

to the touch, and the story inside began: "And there were in that country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night." It ran smoothly, powerfully, like the beautiful deep river which flowed past the Island, and the words sounded like those used by the old men of the tribe when they told their ancient folk-tales in the sugar camps at night while the sugar was boiling. Miss Delaramie had read this story first at Christmas time, and the children had asked for it repeatedly since, because it was about something they could understand. They knew why shepherds kept watch! While she read to them, they pictured that evil thing, called by white men will-o'-the-wisp, creeping stealthily out of the black, mysterious forest, closer and closer upon the sheep and the cuddling white lambs, and they were glad indeed to know that the watching shepherds were there on watch, ready to drive it away again, its hunger unappeased. They knew about stables too, and they fully understood that a child might have no clothes! Joe Pete liked the other story also, the one in the gay red cover, about the Water Babies—he did not know which one he liked better. Without fully understanding why he did it, he covered the books with his coat, then went on with the sweeping.

Armand was waiting impatiently outside. Every few minutes he put his round face inside the door and asked Joe Pete through the cloud of dust if he would soon be through. Even Armand did not offer to help Joe Pete do work which he was paid for doing, though

their friendship had grown steadily to a depth that neither realized. He was waiting because Joe Pete was coming to their store for some groceries for his mother, and because Armand wanted to show him a wonder-marble which his uncle had sent him from the big city. His mother had not allowed him to bring this rare treasure to school: hence his impatience.

Finally the room looked clean. A coat of dust lay thick over the furniture, but Joe Pete knew he could clean that quickly enough in the morning when he came early to build the fire. He took from its nail the gunny sack in which he was to carry the groceries; they closed the door carefully and set off for the store, Armand talking every instant. Joe Pete answered with "Yes" or "No," or merely with his rare smile; but he loved to hear Armand talk. He would have liked to talk too, but he seldom could, even to Armand.

While Armand ran upstairs to get his marble, Joe Pete bought bread, cornmeal, and syrup, and had stowed them away in the sack before Armand returned with the marble held mysteriously behind his back. "Shut your eyes and hold out your hand," said he. Joe Pete did so. Something cool and smooth and round was placed in his palm; then Armand said with intense excitement in his high-pitched voice, "Look! Oh, look quickly, Joe Pete!"

Joe Pete opened his eyes, blinked them a moment or two to clear them, and looked at the thing he held. It was indeed lovely! No wonder Armand was excited! He had talked so much about it, but he had not told

Joe Pete half the beauty of this marble. It was beyond anything Joe Pete had been capable of imagining. The marble was not very large, but it gave one the impression of looking through a little round window straight into the beautiful Christmas story. In the heart of the marble was standing a tiny, white lamb. A blue ribbon was fastened around its neck. Its perfect detail was magnified by the clear glass which enclosed it. Joe Pete, who loved all beautiful things, was fairly hurt by the perfection of it, as though for a moment he held the Unattainable there, close in his thin, soiled hands—and all unconsciously he rubbed those hands on his trousers. He pondered over the marble, oblivious alike of Armand's wild joy-dancing and Mr. Vargatte's amused, sympathetic smile, as he watched the two boys. How did the little white lamb get into the marble? Surely only by magic or by some other supernatural power. Did the whites then have a medicine man more powerful than the Indian magic worker? He was brought to himself by Armand shouting, "Didn't I tell you? Didn't I tell you, Joe Pete!" and then all too quickly he took the marble from Joe Pete's hands to show it to the men who were sitting on the stoop in front of the store, listening to something that Jaakkola was telling them. The boys had seen them there when they came in, and Armand had spoken to them.

Joe Pete was kept from following Armand by Mr. Vargatte, who put a kindly hand on his arm and drew him to the back part of the store. There he talked with the boy. He told him that he needed someone in the

store to help, now that Young John was leaving. The work was not heavy; it consisted of carrying things from the warehouse on the dock to the store; he would have to fill the kerosene cans, sweep the store, and run errands. He asked Joe Pete if he could arrange to work for him one hour each day after school and seven or eight hours on Saturday. Mrs. Vargatte had decided that if Joe Pete came to work for them he was to have supper also at their house before he went home each night. Theophile Vargatte said he could pay him three dollars every week. During their talk, occasional loud words came from the men on the stoop, and every little while there was a roar of loud guffaws, but the two talking so earnestly in the store did not listen.

Joe Pete was dazed at the magnificence of his fortune. Three dollars! Three dollars every week! That meant twelve dollars each month. More than his mother got from her monthly check. He could feed the family on that amount. They need never be hungry again as long as he could work. And queerly enough there was mixed with these elated thoughts the vision of the white lamb marble. His throat felt tight and strained, as it always did when he was tense with suppressed emotion, and his eyes were so softly eloquent that Mr. Vargatte's eyes also were misty as he looked into them, seeing naked there the joy and gratitude that he knew Joe Pete could never put into words. From that moment Mr. Vargatte had a feeling for Joe Pete, which never changed, that was little less than he had for his own son.

Joe Pete was about to say yes, when Armand came

running in, his cheeks flushed and his eyes shining with excitement over the thing he had heard talked by the men on the stoop. Without a thought of anything but his news, he yelled at Joe Pete, "The men all say your mother is a bad woman—a bad woman, Joe Pete!" Then he stopped short, startled at what he had said to his friend, and the strange, disgusted look his father had shot at him. At Armand's words every bit of softness went from Joe Pete's eyes. His happy smile disappeared and his mouth became a thin, hard line in an ashy face. For the first time Theophile Vargatte saw in the child a striking resemblance to his father, Joe Shingoos. Not one word did Joe Pete reply, but his fist shot out toward Armand's face, and blood spurted from Armand's nose and stained his white blouse. Again Joe Pete struck. Armand did not draw back, nor cry out. Even in that full moment Mr. Vargatte felt a warm glow of pride in his son steal over him. Despite his faults Armand was a gentleman! Before another word could be said by any one of them, Joe Pete picked up his gunny sack, rushed from the store, and vanished up the trail toward home. There was that in his face as he passed them which checked all desire for laughter in the men on the stoop. For a long time he ran as though he would run away from this thing Armand had thrown at him, and the painful weariness and ache in his side which finally overtook him were a relief to his stirred emotions.

When he reached the long hill, he seated himself on the grassy mound where long ago he and the old

Nokomis had stopped to rest. He felt as burdened even as she did on that day they had essayed that last long climb. He remembered that she had just lain down and stopped moving forever. How he wished he could stop moving too! Why had Armand been so cruel? He was so tired! Why should everything be so hard for him? Why was he so stirred about what these white men had said about his mother? With his head drooped in his hands and his elbows on his knees, he sat dully wondering; but, strangely, not once did he feel surprise at this knowledge that had come to him about his mother. He remembered Jaakkola's white-toothed smile as he had passed him on entering the store with Armand and knew that this was just another way in which this big foreigner was trying to hurt him. Why was Jaakkola trying to hurt him? He realized that somehow, in the back of his mind, he had always known that Mabel was what the men had called her—sneering as they had said it—a “bad woman.” Little Abe was so bad sometimes that Big John called him a thief, and even a devil; but he knew that the men did not mean that same kind of badness when they spoke of his mother.

He remembered times past. If his mother were as bad as they said, why would these same men have come to visit her? He remembered the men who had come to the cabin, and the many times when he and the other children had been thrust unceremoniously out into the cold second room of the cabin. He thought of the trouble he had had to keep awake until his mother called

them in again—afraid to sleep for fear that she would forget to call them and they would freeze in the unheated room. He began to imagine terrible things about his mother, his imagination whetted by the old tales of witch women, but instead of making him bitter they only filled him with an irresistible desire to weep. Though he was a big boy now and truly brave, in spite of his efforts to restrain them, tears began to drip through his fingers, and great sobs shook his too-slender body. All his hitherto repressed woes also came suddenly flooding over him. He hopelessly threw himself down flat on the mound and gave way to his grief.

So quietly that Joe Pete did not hear them coming, Mr. Vargatte and Armand climbed hand-in-hand up the hill to where he lay, and sat down on the ground beside him. His first intimation that they were there was a hand resting lightly on his shoulder—and he knew that someone was there who understood that he did not like to be touched. He sat up, furtively wiping his eyes, and saw that the hand belonged to Theophile Vargatte. For a while not a word was spoken, but Vargatte's understanding love and sympathy wrapped him round and comforted him immeasurably. Then Armand came shyly toward him, offering the beautiful white lamb marble. "Mamma said I might, so it is for you, Joe Pete," he said simply. Such was his sincere apology for having unintentionally hurt this dearest friend. In the same spirit Joe Pete took the lovely thing from Armand's hands, and they smiled frankly at each other again.

Then, sitting there in the swift-coming dusk, Theophile Vargatte explained in gentle, unhurting words, why the men had called Mabel a "bad woman." He described her one year of happiness and her great love for Joe Pete; why that love made her take Dawas, and later other men, when other forces of hunger and necessity were added. Giving her praise where she deserved praise, blaming her as little as he could, and facing Joe Pete squarely with the predicament of the modern Indian, this kindly, honest Frenchman gave these two small boys as much as he thought they could comprehend of his tolerant understanding of life—tolerance for the mistakes of others, but for himself strict judgment. As Mr. Vargatte talked, Joe Pete raised his head and courage came back to him. A pride of race was born in him. Things, though bad enough, were not as evil as he had imagined. These two Vargattes were his friends, and the white lamb marble was his to keep forever, a symbol of this friendship. He stood up and held out his hand to Mr. Vargatte and to Armand as he had seen white people do. "I must go home now, me," he said, and Mr. Vargatte nodded. They shook hands again. Theophile Vargatte held Joe Pete's hand in a warm grasp and said to him as though nothing had happened to interrupt their former conversation, "So you will then work for me in the store?" And Joe Pete, looking straight into his eyes, said, "Yes," hesitated, then said the word which is so hard for an Indian to say, but which means everything that is implied in the word when he does say it, "Megwetch! I thank you!"

It was very late when he reached the clearing, for all the way home he had walked slowly, forgetting his mother's command to hurry, pondering over and beginning to understand Mr. Vargatte's explanation about his mother. The moon was high above the trees when he arrived, and in its light he looked at his squalid home—for the first time seeing it as it really was. Again the small two-roomed cabin seemed to huddle close under the dark shadows of the night-black spruce trees, as if afraid to be caught by the light. Its peeling, white-washed walls, gleaming furtively in those deep-sheltering shadows, reminded Joe Pete of wild things he had hunted, which always hid and were ready to draw back into deeper retreat at any slightest cause. One might still have passed close on the old trail without knowing a house was there but for the reflected moonlight winking from the one window in the side of the house.

It was now a broken, partially curtained window which caught those inquisitive light rays which penetrated the thick branches overhead and threw them back defiantly at the moon, giving the impression of looking quickly over its shoulder as it did so. That shrouded window was yet the eye of the cabin, through which one glimpsed vaguely the life, or soul, within.

On the edge of the enclosing forest Joe Pete now noticed that the spruce tree branches stretched out into the clearing toward the cabin farther than he remembered, as if eager to hear every sound of human life in the little clearing and pass it on in whispered secrets to their neighbors. Joe Pete stood long, listening to

them intently, and knew now the evil things they had been telling the other trees about his mother. No wonder he had so often heard that peculiar, half-scornful hissing as he passed beneath them. Some of them had not been able to restrain their laughter and had squawked aloud at him. Jerry had told Joe Pete when he was little that this sound was only the trees rubbing together in the wind; but Big John had given him the true Indian explanation. Joe Pete wondered if his big pine had heard the gossip of the other trees, and if that might be the message it had been trying to tell him all these years. But he looked at it, towering above the others, and decided that it was too far above them to have heard, and too mighty in its eternal battle with the higher winds to have listened.

He deliberately stood and looked critically at his home for the first time; saw it as it must appear to Jerry, to the Vargattes, if they should ever come to visit him there. He saw the two newer trails: the one leading to the cabin from the hunting-lodge, now but a faint reminder of the high-booted feet that had trodden it; and the other, well-trodden and hard, leading in from the lumber camp. Hatred of these preying white men once more flamed through him, a hatred that was never to die away entirely again. With this hatred came also a sudden, keen, hard understanding of his mother's situation which had not fully come with the explanation of the Frenchman, an understanding that made him years older, but which redoubled his love for her. He wished fervently that he might set snares on both man-

trails large enough to entrap and hold forever each one who came to the clearing. How he would love to waken some morning and find Jaakkola writhing and squirming with arms and feet held cruelly fast!

His face and eyes were empty of all this before he entered the cabin. While he ate the food that Mabel had fixed for him, the other children climbed up on the bed and went to sleep without a word. They were sharper of perception now than Mabel, and, earlier than she, sensed in Joe Pete a new quality of knowledge and authority which they respected by silence.

After he had eaten, Joe Pete told his mother that he was going to work for Mr. Vargatte in the store. He did not ask permission this time; he merely stated a fact. As he spoke he stood straight and tall with a new dignity, using the pure Indian. Mabel looked at him dully and incuriously at first, for she had become accustomed to Joe Pete's qualities. Then she realized with a sinking heart that now Joe Pete was different, just as she had feared he sometime would be. He had changed, and she had not seen it until too late to hold him as he had been. Yet as she stared at him she knew that she was holding him in the only way that he could be held—through his love for her. Though from this time on he might—and would—bear a man's burdens and work out his life as he wished; though he would decide all questions for himself without asking her permission or advice; behind all this was his loyal love for her. Her eyes dulled again. She was content.

XVII
TEN CENTS

Toward the last of November Miss Delaramie began the planning of the program which the children always gave on Christmas Eve, and to which all the parents gladly came. This was the event of the year for the Island children. They talked of it months ahead and remembered the gladness of it for long months afterward. Every year since Miss Delaramie had come to the school they had had a Christmas tree, and on its fragrant, decorated branches there had been a bag of candy and nuts for every child on the Island whether he came to the school or not. For each child who belonged to the school there was a gift which the powerful, white Magician brought for them at Miss Delaramie's request. She called him Santa Claus, or the Spirit of Christmas. They were even asked what they would like to have this Magician bring them, for they might have whatever they wished; but they preferred to let him choose the gift—then there was always the delightful suspense and surprise.

From what Miss Delaramie said it seemed that this Spirit lived in the far north, near the lair of Peboon, the bad Indian spirit, who brought winter to the Island.

Santa Claus made all the gifts with his own hands, and after his squaw had dressed the dolls, he brought his load of toys down from the shining ice-fields with a magic team of eight fleet reindeer, which Miss Delaramie said were much like those that roamed over their own Island. She even knew the odd names of these reindeer, and to their delight said them over and over until they too mastered the queer sounds which made up the names. They all had secret hopes that on some Christmas Eve they might actually see this benevolent Magician outlined against the moon as he made his swift flight over the Island.

This year the program was to be quite pretentious. The children had heard so often the story of the shepherds watching with their sheep on the night of the birth of the Christ Child, that Miss Delaramie thought they might dramatize parts of the story. They were delighted with the suggestion, not only because they liked the story, but because it would be acted in pantomime and they would not have to speak. She was pleased with their quick response and preparations went forward merrily.

The old log schoolhouse seemed like a fairy place to the children that last month before Christmas Day. Always there was something new and wonderful to be done, and trimmings to be made from brightly colored paper. The youngsters came to school as early as possible in the morning and could hardly bear to leave at night. First Miss Delaramie's desk was moved to the back of the room and all the front part of the school

was left for an informal stage. Then the beautiful, straight-tapered balsam was brought in and the place where it should stand chosen by the children. For two or three days it stood there before them, while Miss Delaramie showed them how beautiful it was with its flat-needed, redolent branches, and told them the story of the little Fir Tree. Each morning when they came the room was full of its pungent aroma. They had never known how beautiful a tree was until they lived so intimately with this one. They all began to call it "The Tree."

Then came the decorating, which transformed the bare, shabby room. All the children helped to make gay red-and-green chains and strung them from corner to corner of the ceiling. These swayed beautifully in every slight breeze and in the heat waves from the stove, and there was a delightful rustling sound in this swaying paper which made them almost believe that the Christmas Tree was swaying too.

Mrs. Vargatte sent baskets of popped corn and shiny red cranberries with Armand. These they strung and wound from branch to branch of the tree. On one of his trips to town Jerry brought for them a box of gleaming fairy-balls of silver and gold and rainbow colors. Each child had the chance to hang one ball on the tree, and some held on to the delicate, fragile bubbles as though they could not bear to have them go from their fingers again. Jerry stayed while they hung them on the tree, lifting the smaller children so they might reach the higher branches. When all the balls

were hung the children would have been perfectly content just to sit and gaze at the beauty of the shifting lights and colors, but Jerry had another surprise for them. Close to the tree he placed a chair, and on that a strong box. "Come here, Joe Pete," he said casually, though he knew the children were tense with wonder. The room was spring-woods quiet now with expectancy. When the boy came to him, Jerry reached into his overcoat pocket, pulled out a square, flat package and handed it to Joe Pete. "That is for the very top of the tree," he said to the hushed youngsters, "and Joe Pete is to put it there. Open it, son."

Joe Pete's fingers were clumsy with excitement, but he finally opened the package. There on a cloudy bed of crushed white tissue paper lay a scintillating, tinsel star. A gasp of wonder came from the children, and little Jennie Big John put her head down on her desk and cried from sheer unbelievable happiness. Jerry went over and patted her shoulder, and after a while she wiped her eyes and watched with the other children while Joe Pete carefully climbed up on the chair, then on the box, then with utmost caution bent the tip of the tree toward him and almost reverently fastened the star to it.

Practice went on steadily day after day until the children were perfect in their parts and filled with confidence. They were working one day on the dramatization of the shepherds watching their flocks by night, when one of the children suggested that they should have some sheep. Miss Delaramie seldom failed to

follow any suggestion which came spontaneously from these silent youngsters; and as she was sure they could not produce any sheep she agreed that it was a drawback that they had none. But she had not counted on the ingenuity of these woods children for Jennie Big John came to the rescue of her beloved teacher. If Miss Delaramie wanted sheep, then she should have sheep if Jennie could provide them for her. She was quite diffident in her suggestion that her father would let them use the Big Johns' pet goat, but Miss Delaramie knew that the suggestion meant much to the little girl. Someone had given this goat to the family three years before, and for some reason they had named him Ten Cents. Ten Cents often followed the Big John children to school and browsed around until they went home again. Miss Delaramie had forgotten about him, though Jerry had always whistled "Mary Had a Little Lamb," when he passed and saw him there. Jennie was sure that he might be used in the part. Miss Delaramie had her doubts, but did not like to make any objections. Ten Cents had always been good tempered, and if it would please the children to have him in their play she was very willing to have him in it. Jerry laughed uproariously when she told him about it and asked his advice, but said he saw no reason why Ten Cents could not play the part of a peaceful sheep. He was sure the goat would stand docilely on the platform with the children as long as they needed him. Miss Delaramie asked the Big John children to bring Ten Cents for the next rehearsal, and he was so tractable that she had no fear for

his behavior on the final night, especially when Jennie promised to watch him every moment.

Christmas Eve came that year on Friday, and though a blizzard was portending, the children were in school all day, busily putting the final touches on the tree and room. Just before dismissal a vigorous knock came on the door and when Miss Delaramie opened it, there stood Jerry outlined against a white background of whirling snowflakes with an enormous box on his shoulder. Jerry never could control his childlike eagerness to see these ordinarily stolid youngsters excited and happy, and he never lost an opportunity to startle them out of their stoicism if possible. "Say," he called merrily—and there was always something infectious about Jerry's merriment—"have all you kids been asleep? Here's this big box labeled 'From Santa Claus' lying pretty near on your doorstep and not one of you knew it, I'm willing to bet. See, it's almost covered with snow it's been there so long, and I can hardly read the card on it. Of course it might be for somebody else."

The children crowded around him. Sure enough, there was snow on the box, but Miss Delaramie carefully deciphered the blurred writing and said it was for them. Again Santa Claus had come and gone without their seeing him. But that was the habit of spirits, and their happiness was too intense to be bedimmed for more than a moment by this incident. Jerry had further news for them. Even before he began to speak they knew it from the twinkle in his eyes. He turned to Miss Delaramie.

“Mrs. Vargatte says to tell you that all these kids are to come home with Armand and have supper with him tonight. It’s too blustery for them to go away home and back again, and anyway Armand’s uncle sent a surprise to all of them. Mr. Vargatte has been sending word to their people all afternoon not to expect them home. Send them all off now so I can open this box and begin filling that balsam.”

Such happiness! Eating at Armand’s, as some of them knew either from experience or hearsay, meant fragrant hot cocoa with all the sugar they craved to put in it; bread with butter spread thick upon it; maybe ice cream! They hurried for their coats. Jerry and Miss Delaramie helped to disentangle arms from wrong sleeves and put them into right ones, helped with rubbers and scarfs, and finally they were all off down the short trail to Armand’s house, with Armand joyously in the lead. This was the sort of thing he loved best, and he thought gratefully how kind his mother was to plan this surprise for him. As soon as they were gone, Jerry opened the box, and he and Miss Delaramie filled the tree with the gifts “from Santa Claus.” Their fingers touched occasionally as they both reached down into the fast-emptying box, and somehow it all seemed quite natural and matter-of-fact. Jerry was intensely happy.

The supper at Vargattes’ was all that the children expected of it. Even before they reached the store the fragrance of the hot cocoa came to their red little noses and made them ravenously hungry. Mrs. Vargatte had

put two tables together and all sat as at one long table, which was full of good things to eat. Armand was here and there like a flash, helping a bashful child to more cocoa or food, filling up the sandwich plates or going to the kitchen for more cake. Joe Pete was a willing helper, and enjoyed vicariously this new experience of acting as host to a group and giving them all they wished. Miss Delaramie came in later and also helped. And they were all so excited and happy in this unusual experience that they forgot about the surprise Armand's uncle had sent to them from the city.

At six-thirty they were back at the schoolhouse, and at seven practically all the parents had arrived. Big John brought Ten Cents, and he and Jerry tied him up in a corner of the improvised stage, where he was hidden from sight behind the curtain and was out of the way until he was needed.

It seemed to the Islanders that the tree had never been so beautiful as it was this year. It stood just in front of the white curtain, against which every perfect branch was sharply outlined. Its shimmering tinsel star and gleaming fairy balls caught and multiplied every shaft of light from the flickering kerosene lamps and lanterns which were hung on the walls. The grown-ups admired it fully as much as the children and were grateful to Miss Delaramie for her kindness to their children. They knew too that the plump, gay tarlatan bags of candy and nuts were given by Mr. and Mrs. Vargatte, and to them all came once more the realization that these two were "fine fellers" and loyal friends. The

good feeling that had always persisted between the Island whites and the Indians, but which had been rather strained since the fire, returned again, and they settled back comfortably in their seats and prepared to enjoy the program and applaud Indian and white children alike. Miss Delaramie sensed this friendlier attitude and was deeply thankful for her small share toward it.

The program went without a hitch until it came to the dramatization which was the last number before the distribution of the candy and gifts. Not a child had forgotten his piece because of shyness, and the singing of the old carols in their childish voices had been beautiful. When it was time for the dramatization all the lights on the stage were extinguished or removed, except for one dim, blue-shaded one which cast a light that was like dull, hazy moonlight. The effect was really lovely, and the children who represented the shepherds were solemn indeed in acting out their parts. Jennie Big John was so intent on watching the able performance of her big brother Marcelle, that she had no eyes for Ten Cents, who had been released from his rope and was wandering at will, but very quietly, about the stage. He seemed quite content to stay up in his proper place with the children without any coercion from anyone. But Jerry was watching everything that was happening on the stage, for he did not want any of Miss Delaramie's carefully wrought plans to go awry and make her unhappy. He noticed that at intervals Ten Cents gave a little pull at the tree, but he could not see very well from where he

sat, and there did not seem to be any swaying of the tree when Ten Cents jerked. So he concluded that there was no harm being done to it. This happened quite often while the dramatization was going on. Suddenly Big John, who was the tallest man there, and who was standing in the rear of the room after having given his place to someone else, poked Jerry and pointed at the stage with his thumb. There was a look upon the big Indian's face which told Jerry that something serious was happening. He stood up beside Big John, and then saw what Ten Cents was doing. Almost all of those gay, plump tarlatan bags, which had been so carefully made and filled with candy and nuts by Mrs. Vargatte, were gone, and at every twitch of the tree by Ten Cents one more disappeared. Only the few that were out of his reach were left, and he was beginning to crane his neck for those. Consternation seized these two men. They did not know what to do, for they knew that those bags of candy and the supper at Mrs. Vargatte's that night had completely depleted the stock of candy that the store possessed. What could they do? They went softly over to Mr. Vargatte and drew him out into the entry to see what he could suggest. There Indian and white wits worked at top speed, for in a few moments the children would discover the theft of their sweets by Ten Cents, and grief would be the result. What would Christmas be without candy to these small ones who often got their only taste of it at that time! Suddenly Mr. Vargatte had an inspiration. He had heard Mrs. Vargatte say they had forgotten the surprise

which the uncle of Armand had sent for the children. If Big John would consent to hold the children quiet until they returned, he and Jerry would rush home and return with the surprise. It might possibly have in it some strange, new things which would so charm the children that they might forget the loss of the candy. Also they would bring along some oranges. Big John consented, the men rushed out of the door; but almost before he could step into the room the dramatization was finished and Ten Cents' depredation was discovered. Big John hurried to the platform and faced the dismayed teacher and children, and there was an assurance about his huge body that inspired a hope that the situation might not be so bad as it appeared. Big John pointed dramatically at the goat, then laughed as at a huge joke, and taking Ten Cents by the horns, he escorted him to the door and thrust him out. Someone among the grown-ups laughed, and then a ripple of it spread through the room. Big John smiled and went back to the platform. Spreading his arms out, he began to talk to them.

"That Ten Cents is one bad goat, but she don' know she is not to eat those candy. She think if she play that part for you she can have that candy for you too. Jerry and Mr. Vargatte have gone for that surprise sent by the uncle of Armand. While we wait for them the teacher will give those Santa Claus gift, and Big John will help."

And Big John did help. With a laugh for one disconsolate child and a joke for another, he made them

forget the loss of the candy and kept the whole group laughing until all the gifts were distributed. Then they were opened and admired, and they were just the gifts that each one had wanted most. Black eyes shone bright as the fairy balls on the tree and smiles were radiant. Before there was time to fully admire the presents, Jerry and Mr. Vargatte were back with the big box and oranges for everyone in the crowd.

Armand had the honor of opening the box, but he insisted that Joe Pete should help. Finally the top was loosened and pried open. The boys took out a layer of gay shredded tissue packing, and then lifted out a huge package which lay just beneath. When they removed the paper they found a mechanical toy for each child in the school. There were black men that danced on platforms, trains that ran across the entire room, bugs that crawled, butterflies that fluttered their wings, chickens that pecked at fat grains of corn—there were wonders that even the grown-ups had never seen before. The children were almost afraid of these cleverly constructed toys which seemed to be alive when they moved across the floor.

Under this package was another, not so large, but it contained the most beautiful things of the evening. For each child there was a big wonderfully-colored Santa Claus of candy. Every small detail was carefully done in pure sugar that glistened and sparkled. Each one was an exact replica of the Santa Claus in Miss Delaramie's book. In the bottom of the box were smaller Santa Clauses, just as beautifully red-and-white, for the

children who did not belong to the school. There were enough for all the children who were there, and some left to send home to those who were unable to come. Joe Pete had two for Frank and Abe. Not a child was forgotten; they were all in a daze of happiness when Miss Delaramie announced that the program was ended.

Slowly, reluctantly, the Islanders dispersed. They all hated to leave, but the blizzard was growing fiercer. Every time the door was opened the swirling snowflakes and the wind, which came roaring in through the vestibule, setting the tree swaying and threatening to extinguish all the lights, warned them not to delay much longer. As each one took the lantern that belonged to him, the room became dimmer and dimmer, until it was lighted only by the kerosene lamps hanging on the walls. Shadows grew taller and blacker in the corners of the room, and spots of orange light which came through the holes in the stove flickered against the ceiling like flying swallows. The shadow of the tree fell on the opposite wall and reached far up to the ceiling through the darting lights. While Mr. and Mrs. Vargatte and Armand gathered up the debris from the floor, Miss Delaramie and Jerry removed the fairy balls from the tree and carefully wrapped them in paper for the next Christmas. Mr. and Mrs. Vargatte helped Armand put his treasures in a basket and left, calling to the other two that the storm was growing worse. Jerry called back that they would come as soon as they had taken the star from the tree. He carried the chair over to the tree, bent it carefully toward him, and was about to take the star from

its tree top when Miss Delaramie stopped him. "Jerree," she said (and Jerry loved the way she pronounced his name), "Christmas Day is like all other days to our Joe Pete and he will come in the morning to clean up. Let's leave the star for him." Jerry bent down and took one of her hands close in his. "My dear," he said. "My dear!" They too were in a daze of happiness as they blew out the remaining lights, closed the door securely, and started down the too short trail to the store.

After the school door closed the room became warmer, though the wind increased to a howling bellow. The orange lights flickered more slowly against the ceiling, and the gay paper chains swayed in the drafts that crept through the crevices in the old building. The noise of their rustling almost muffled the sound of the dropping needles from the dying Christmas tree. Fragrant and more fragrant became the room as the hours passed. Shadow-edges became softened and indistinct and merged into the encroaching darkness. The star scintillated and sparkled under the dancing orange lights. Slowly, very slowly, the light-dance softened and faded away, but the fragrant spirit of a happy Christmas remained in the room.

XVIII

THE PINE TREE

Joe Pete liked his new job of working in the store. Mr. Vargatte taught him incidentally many things as he worked, not the least of which was that he must not bite those he did not know if they happened to touch him unexpectedly. The Vargattes were as courteous in their family life as they were in their dealings with the public. Joe Pete, from his association with them, absorbed much of that refinement which was typical of them, and added it to that unconscious, innate courtesy which was his own heritage. He carried their courtesy into his own family relations. He became more vigilant and untiring in his kindness to his mother and the two boys. Yet the change in Joe Pete came about so gradually, was so natural a growth, that only occasionally did Mabel notice the improvement in him, and she took it all as a matter of course. If she had not become so self-absorbed, she would have resented bitterly the change in the child, thinking that he was patterning himself after the whites. So much of the time she was dull and stupid with pain that nothing impressed her for long.

After school had closed for the summer months Joe Pete worked full time in the store and Mr. Vargatte

raised his wages another dollar. Now Joe Pete was earning sixteen dollars a month, which was an unheard-of wage for a boy on an Island where men worked in the lumber camps for forty and fifty dollars a month, and thought it was "big" wages. Even Big John, who was carrying the mail again this year, received only fifty dollars a month from the government. Joe Pete was the happiest boy on the Island when he took his four dollars home every Saturday night and poured it into his mother's lap. All that he kept for himself was a few pennies with which he bought some candy for the children. He felt as grown-up as Big John when he handed to the expectant Frank the little paper bag which always held the two sticks of candy. Prolonging the delight of the occasion both for himself and Joe Pete, Frank's delicate fingers explored and delved, then shared with Abe. When Joe Pete was home Frank was exquisitely happy. He made no demands on this beloved older brother, but he always felt safe and protected when Joe Pete was there. Jerry had restrung an old violin which still held sweetness in its mellowed wood frame, and had given it to Frank, who had tried ever since to show Joe Pete through his music the wondrous colors which floated before his sightless eyes. And once in a while he drew tones from the battered old camp instrument which filled Joe Pete with delight, and made a startled Mabel turn from her work to stare at him.

Had it not been for the presence of Jaakkola, Joe Pete would have been utterly happy. Mr. Vargatte had talked seriously with him about Jaakkola one day

shortly after the affair in the store, and had warned him to be very cautious about provoking the foreigner. He asked Joe Pete why it was that Jaakkola hated him, and the boy was honest when he answered that he did not know. Neither could he decide why he hated Jaakkola. It had just happened so at the beginning. A sudden hatred had flashed from one to the other and had never died out again. Mr. Vargatte shook his head, puzzled for an explanation. He could not understand anyone who did not like and admire the fineness of the boy, but he told Joe Pete that he was sure that Jaakkola would break him if he could, and would try many different methods if he thought they would serve to accomplish his purpose. He was the kind who would stop at nothing. "Remember this," Vargatte said seriously to the boy. "That man has pity for nothing small or helpless. Helplessness in another makes him more cruel to that one. If you continue to anger him he may hurt the little blind brother so as to hurt you."

The very thought of such a thing happening to Frank made Joe Pete sick with fear, but he knew that the Frenchman spoke the truth about Jaakkola, and he thanked him for the warning. He had seen Jaakkola deliberately tread upon and crush a tiny baby bird that had fallen from its nest, and laugh when the frantic mother bird swooped at his head protestingly. He agreed with Mr. Vargatte, and after this warning, modified his behavior toward Jaakkola and used craft in his dealings with him when he was at the cabin. Jaakkola had always been oblivious of Frank's presence.

Joe Pete now prayed with all his heart that he would remain so. Since Sam was no longer on the Island Jaakkola usually came to visit Mabel again in the evenings. Joe Pete did not glower at him any longer from a dim corner of the room, but busied himself with his books and tried unobtrusively to keep Frank out of sight. After school stopped and the weather became warm, it was easier to evade the man. When Joe Pete felt that he could no longer bear the sight of the big black foreigner, he called to Frank softly, they took the old violin, and gently guiding the blind child, Joe Pete would lead him out under the huge pine tree where they stayed until Jaakkola went away again. Frank did not mind the night—darkness was the same as daylight to him, and any place was a happy one if his beloved Joe Pete were with him. It was at these times that Frank played best. Together they put their heads close to the trunk of the pine tree and listened to that mysterious whisper which Joe Pete was always just on the verge of understanding, yet which always eluded him.

“Do you hear that song of loveliness, my small Frank?” he asked, always using the pure, musical Indian language with the child, constantly urging him to more intent listening. He hoped that the more finely attuned ears of Frank might catch the elusive riddle of the tree.

The blind child nodded. “The words spoken by the old tree are so fragrant,” he answered discouragedly. “I cannot make fragrance in my music!”

“Do not try for the fragrance, little keen-smeller,”

Joe Pete urged over and over again patiently. "Listen only to what he speaks to us."

Carefully and earnestly Frank listened, and day after day while Joe Pete was away in the store he consoled himself in his loneliness by striving to repeat on his violin the message of the tree, until Abe usually came up and snatched the violin away from him.

Abe did this once too often, however. Then someone interfered. Jerry happened to be passing when he overheard Frank playing to himself. The boy was really doing splendidly, Jerry thought, and he went closer to the cabin to listen. The door was open, and Jerry stood there unobserved, listening, and rather amazed. He saw Abe sneaking up toward Frank on cat-quiet feet, but did not guess his intention until Abe had grabbed the violin and had run away with it out of Frank's reach. It was evident that Frank had learned well the uselessness of pleading with Abe or appealing to his mother; he put his hands up over his face and cried silently, hopelessly. Abe danced round about him and twitted him mockingly, fairly abandoning himself to an ecstasy of hatefulness, his long, black hair flying in the breeze caused by his own swift movements. Mabel did not even look up from her weaving. Jerry did not hesitate, though he knew he was doing something for which Mabel probably would never forgive him. He strode into the room, took the violin from the dancing, tousle-headed imp and laid it again on Frank's lap. Then he picked the startled Abe up by the straps of his faded blue overalls and gave him a

short, sharp spanking. Abe kicked and fought and screamed, then broke into violent sobbing. Jerry suddenly realized that the child was only a small, untrained animal, and put him on his feet again, holding him firmly by his shoulders.

"Now you look here, Abe," he said, and there was something in his voice that scared that hard little rascal more than the spanking. "Don't you ever make Frank cry again. If you tease Frank as you did today, I'll—I'll—" He stopped and turned to Mabel in appeal, for he could not fight a small child.

"What's the matter with you anyway these days, Mabel?" he flared out at her. "You think a lot of Joe Pete and yet you let that little devil do the very thing that would hurt Joe Pete most if he knew it."

Mabel turned on him with a flash of her old independence, but even before she spoke it faded away again. "Frank cry too easy," she said indifferently. "Abe don' hurt her. She cry all time, that one, for not'ing!"

Jerry looked at her wonderingly. "God, but you've changed, Mabel. You're certainly getting to be hard-boiled. You know better than that! And don't think for one minute that I don't know what made Elizabeth dig out from this house that day she fell in the bog."

But Mabel only repeated her first statement. "Abe don' hurt that Lizbet!"

"I'm going to see Big John about this, Mabel," Jerry threatened her. "You're not fit to have children here if you let them act worse than animals."

Mabel refused to answer him again. She knew that

Joe Pete would not leave her no matter what Jerry might tell him about her, and she did not care if Jerry and Big John did take the other two away from her. Jerry turned to Abe, hoping to make some impression on him. "Remember, Abe," he repeated, "if I catch you teasing Frank again, I'll—" He floundered, then was inspired with a dreadful threat: "I'll take Joe Pete away with me and you'll never see him again."

Abe stared, tears still running from his eyes. Jerry went to Frank and patted his hand, but Frank would not be comforted. The blundering Jerry had hurt Frank with his threat more than he had hurt Abe. What would life be for Frank without Joe Pete? What misery! The thought of losing Joe Pete made him wince as though Jerry had struck him. Jerry was unaware of what was going through the blind boy's mind. "You're doing fine with the music, Frank," he encouraged him. "Keep it up!"

Frank caught the hand which patted his and held it tightly. Maybe he could explain to this kind one. "Abe bad because she don' know no better," he said. But Jerry was still angry and remained firm.

"He's a little devil," he said.

Again Frank pleaded. "You won' take my Joe Pete 'way? Almost have I the song for her."

"What song?" asked Jerry, evading the boy's question.

"The song of the big, good-smelling tree that is the kind friend of my Joe Pete," Frank answered. "When my Joe Pete is sorry, the tree sing to her."

Jerry melted. Poor little devils! No chance, no opportunity to live any other kind of life. Talking with trees that sang to them when life became unbearable! For an instant he hated Mabel who had borne these children.

Frank repeated his question anxiously. "Don' take my Joe Pete, Jerry! Nobody else don' like the blind Frank but my Joe Pete!" There is no word for "please" in the Indian tongue, and the child had not heard it in English or he would have added it to his pleading. His thin fingers still held tight to Jerry's big ones, and Jerry felt the terror of the child trembling through them. He felt also a chubby hand pulling at the laces in the tops of his high boots. He looked down into the big eyes of Abe, solemn now, all the mischief wiped out of them. Jerry gave in. Kneeling close to them he drew Abe to him and hugged him. Abe squeezed tightly against him. Jerry surrendered completely. "Blue-heeled Billy! No! If Abe is a good boy, I'll never take your Joe Pete away."

Mabel smiled sardonically over her weaving, bending her head low so Jerry should not see. The ways of these blustering whites were beyond all understanding! But Jerry's rebuke had hurt her more than she realized.

Abe remembered the episode and was better. The few times he forgot, he was amazed at being sharply reprimanded by his mother. She had never before seemed to notice when he had teased Frank. It made an impression upon him that he never forgot. Frank

and Abe might be "only half-breeds," but they were Indian enough not to tell Joe Pete about the affair.

Shortly after this incident Jaakkola left the Island. He had received a registered letter that Mr. Vargatte could not help seeing was from Miss Marks. After reading it he had gone suddenly. He did not take Selma, so Mr. Vargatte decided that he was expecting to return later. His departure made Joe Pete completely happy.

But after Jaakkola went, Mabel became restless and irritable, sometimes beyond all bearing. She worked fitfully, and often sat for hours at the window, staring down the trail as though she expected someone to come. She knew that Jaakkola did not love her and that he would have laughed raucously at the mere thought of it; but she missed him. So few persons passed the cabin, and so seldom did any of these come in, that often for days at a time she had no opportunity to speak with anyone. Joe Pete was worried. He knew that she was restless and discontented, and tried to entertain her with the bits of news he picked up in the Settlement. But there was now a great gulf of silence between them. Talking to entertain anyone was not his forte, and though he started out well enough, he soon ran out of words. Mabel appreciated his efforts only half-heartedly. She was too sure of his constant love for her. She knew too that even if he did lose his regard for her, he would stay because he adored Frank. Frank would always be a bond that would tie

Joe Pete to the cabin and her. It somehow did not seem to matter to her what did, or might, happen. Since Jaakkola had been coming to the cabin the fine edge of her love for Joe Pete had gradually dulled. She could not feel toward him as she had done when he was smaller. She supposed it was the same with all women when their sons begin to grow into manhood. She wished that Jaakkola would return, and for a long time could not understand why she wished for him, nor the impatience which mastered her. She knew that she had no such feeling for him as she had had for Dawas, and he had never awakened that wondrous glow she had felt for Simpson. But one afternoon when she could not remain sitting at her weaving for more than five minutes at a time, she knew why she missed Jaakkola, and understood that it was not the man himself she missed or wanted, but the bottle which he always carried in his pocket and shared with her when he came to the cabin. She had come to need the liquor, and had not known it until it had been withheld because of Jaakkola's departure. She laughed loudly, mirthlessly, when she realized this, but after she knew what it was that she was missing, her desire for it became quickly intolerable.

At the store the next day she asked Mr. Vargatte if he sold whisky. He was dismayed at her question, for he knew now what the situation must be in her cabin, but hid his knowledge from her. "No," he said, "I do not. I would have to have a license to sell it, and I do not like to handle it in the store. But Delima

has some home-made wine that she will share with you if you need a little."

She refused his offer, and asked for her letter. Mr. Vargatte looked over the small pile of mail dubiously. He was full of pity for Joe Pete in this new situation that was developing.

"I thought I had not seen it, Mrs. Shingoos. No mail for you this trip."

She looked at him questioningly.

"Perhaps Big John will bring it on the next trip," he said.

Surprise made Mabel dumb. The letter from Simpson had always come on that same date regularly each month.

"I will send it with Joe Pete when it comes," Mr. Vargatte promised, but she would not agree.

"No. I come get it, me."

For the next three weeks she went to the store three times each week on the mail days, but there was no check from Simpson. Mr. Vargatte could tell her nothing, for aside from Mabel's check there had been no direct communication from Simpson after he left the Island. The letters about the hunting lodge had come from Simpson's lawyer. When a month passed and no check came, Mabel gave up hope, and succumbed to her unquiet spirit. She had depended on the red-headed luck and had felt safe in the protection of it no matter what she did that was unwise. Now that she felt it had been taken from her she became rather desperate, ceasing to keep up even a semblance of decency.

Joe Pete tried to reassure her about the loss of the money, but she turned on him fiercely and railed at him like a shrew. He was too amazed to answer, but all unconsciously his respect for her began to lessen. He had come to hold Mrs. Vargatte as his ideal woman. He saw how far below her his mother had now fallen. He had always felt that her love for him could never change; he discovered that it had, and that his love for her had almost died. After her angry spell passed, she was sullen with him and seldom looked at him.

On Friday she told him to ask Mrs. Big John if the children might stay with her the next day, which was mail day, while she went to town with a load of baskets. That had been the usual arrangement after Joe Pete had started to work all day in the store. Mrs. Big John agreed.

Saturday morning Mabel and the children went with Joe Pete as far as the store. Joe Pete carried the baskets for his mother. As he was going into the store she told him to call for the children after he was through work. That, too, was not unusual, for the boys loved to stay at Big John's, and often coaxed to be allowed to remain and come home with Joe Pete. He agreed and the two boys were delighted with the prospects of a long, happy day of play with the Big John children. It was a delight to them to be so close to the water and have other children to play with.

After he had eaten his supper with the Vargattes, Joe Pete went around to Big John's to get the boys. They were waiting for him. When Abe saw him coming he

ran to meet him, and Joe Pete hurried to Frank, who was trying to follow. Big John came to the door, his mouth full of food. He was finishing his supper. He drew Joe Pete inside the door, pointed to a chair, then sat down to his interrupted meal again.

"Your mother did not come, my Joe Pete," he said, and took a great gulp of scalding hot tea so he would not have to look at the boy. "She missed us, and you know the mail boat cannot wait."

"I know," said Joe Pete quietly enough. "I know the mail must come through." But his heart began to thump and his throat tightened in that old way it had. What would his mother do in town all night? Where would she stay?

"She will be all right, Joe Pete," said Big John, seeing the boy's distress. "She will find Charlotte who is now in the town and stay the night with her."

Joe Pete could not answer.

"You will stay this night with us, Joe Pete," insisted Mrs. Big John. "The children must stay with me tomorrow until your mother returns."

Joe Pete refused quietly. "They will come home with me tonight, Mrs. Big John, and I will bring them tomorrow again. My mother will come tomorrow."

"Yes," agreed Big John. "Mabel will come with someone tomorrow."

But Mabel did not come "tomorrow," nor the next day, nor yet the next. After four days of waiting Joe Pete was fearful that something had happened to her. He had never been to the town and did not know what

could happen, but he was still firm in his faith that she would not stay away from them unless she was forced to do so for some very good reason. He begged Big John to try to find her when he went to town on the next mail day, and Big John promised.

He kept his promise too, and brought her home with him when he returned. He never told anyone where or how he had found her, or the method he had been forced to use to induce her to come with him. But he had discovered that the name of Joe Pete had lost its magic potency over Mabel.

The children had never seen her so gay. She laughed wildly when she saw them and continued to giggle all the way home. Abe thought it was all some new kind of game, and laughed gleefully at the absurdity of his mother's falling two or three times on the trail as they slowly walked home. Joe Pete did not laugh. His face set in stern lines that made him look years older. He had seen Charlotte long ago stumble and fall on the trail to their cabin, and it was because he felt that there was something degraded in her inability to stand upright or control herself that he had hated her. It all came back to him as he followed his mother. For once he was glad that Frank could not see. He hushed Abe, and patiently helped his mother to her feet again after each fall.

When they were halfway to the clearing she began to get ugly, and struck at him when he approached to help her. He did not even then resent her attitude toward him, knowing that she did not know what she

was doing. But deep inside him was a great cold weight, heavier than any that Mr. Vargatte used on his scales. When they finally reached the cabin Mabel took from her bundle a bottle like those Jaakkola carried and drank from it. It seemed as though she would never get enough of it. She would not eat. And now Joe Pete knew why his mother had gone to town; why she had been so irritable after Jaakkola left; and he was sure now that she had deliberately planned to stay in town until she was able to procure what she wanted, without any thought of them alone in the cabin.

Later he helped her to bed, and the sleepy Abe crawled in beside her. Joe Pete listened to Frank play for a time, and then coaxed him to go to bed too. Frank would not stay beside his mother.

"Put a blanket for me on the floor," he begged. "There is a bad smell by our mother. It comes from her mouth." Joe Pete chided him gently, but Frank persisted; so Joe Pete did as he wished.

After Frank had fallen asleep Joe Pete went silently out into the night. There were no stars, but he did not need any to guide him to his familiar destination. Slowly he made his way to the big pine tree, pressed his cheek close against the rough bark for a moment, then sank in a little heap at the foot of the tree. The soft darkness folded him close, and for a long space of time he was one with the dark night. Jaakkola, all unknowingly, had broken him at last through this degradation of his mother. There was no atom of bravery, no shred of pride left in him. He was only a small boy

facing a life that was too powerful for him, that was cruelly beating him.

The blind night wind, which in the north country always wanders through the dark, beginning at dusk to feel its way back to the place of the Four Winds from whence it started, passed seekingly over him and touched his hot cheek with coolness. Under its delicate touch the huge pine tree shivered to life. Joe Pete felt the mighty stem of it vibrate to the caress of the wind, like the strings of Frank's violin. The wind and the tree together spoke to Joe Pete, each interpreting the other, and the message came through unblurred. Joe Pete was too full of agony to catch the sound. Over and over they repeated it, and at last it reached him, penetrating his discouragement and misery. He listened breathlessly. Then he suddenly understood what this old tree friend was saying to him. At last he understood! He lifted his head high in ecstasy, and looked reverently up at this tree which loved him enough to bend its shaggy head to speak with him. Then, still kneeling, he bowed his head low to the ground before the tree in a quick, impulsive obeisance foreign to him.

In a moment he sprang to his feet and his head came once more proudly erect. "Megwetch! Megwetch! Mighty one! My beloved Shingwauk!" he said just above the soft breathing of the wind. "Never again shall thy friend Joe Pete be afraid of hurt. Megwetch!"

XIX

“THOROUGHbred”

Mabel had another big load of odorous, sweet-grass baskets ready to take to town, and she insisted that Frank and Abe were big enough to stay alone now while she and Joe Pete were away all day. Frank was ten in July and Abe would be six in August. She told Joe Pete that he had stayed alone with the younger children when he was six years old, and she felt that Abe should be responsible for Frank now that he was the same age. Joe Pete had determined that Abe was to begin school in the fall, and Miss Delaramie had given permission to have Frank stay all day and amuse himself as best he could until he had become accustomed to his surroundings and had lost his fear. Then slowly she would begin to give him tasks that he could do. But even though Joe Pete had planned all this for fall, he did not feel that Abe could be trusted alone in the cabin all day with the blind boy while his mother went to town and he was in the store. So he asked Katie Big John, one of the older Big John girls, to stay with the children while he and his mother were away. Katie agreed, and she came early in the morning before either Joe Pete or Mabel had started from the cabin.

Joe Pete accompanied his mother down to the Island

dock and carried the baskets for her. For some reason Mabel was depressed and unhappy this morning. She hated the heat and did not want to go to town, for she knew that the day was going to be unusually hot and sultry. She loathed the cement walks on hot days. She consoled herself as best she could, however. They needed the money very badly, and she really would not have to do much tramping. Her baskets were destined for the Green Front Curio Store, and they were due today. She must deliver them at the appointed time, or the man who owned the store would not take them at all and would never give her another order. He was particular because he could not afford to have a stock of baskets left on his hands after the tourist season was over, and in the north country the tourist season is short. Mabel felt that she must go to town, regardless of the heat.

She and Joe Pete were early for the mail boat and walked leisurely down to the end of the dock. Joe Pete had half an hour before he was supposed to appear at the store, and he longed to have a short visit with Big John. He climbed down the dock into the motor boat and found Big John working over his engine. One look at Big John's face stopped any attempt at conversation with him. Joe Pete sat quietly by and watched him: Big John was plainly worried. He was having engine trouble, and he had never overcome his natural suspicion of engines. When his motor balked he immediately got confused. This was his ninth year as mail-carrier, and it had always been his proud boast

that never once had the mail been late since he had started hauling it. He tinkered hopelessly with the stubborn engine—then cranked. It refused to start. Over and over he did this, but there was no response from the engine. He looked at Joe Pete and spread out his hands in a big, helpless gesture. "Damn!" he said fervently. "She is devil engun, her!" Joe Pete nodded. He hated to see Big John in trouble and longed to help him, but he knew nothing about an engine and had to go to the store. Reluctantly he bade Big John good-bye and left him.

He had been working more than an hour at the store when he saw his mother approaching. She remained outside the door and beckoned to him to come out to her. After she had found that there were no more checks coming from Simpson, she had decided that Mr. Vargatte had finally written to him and told him about the death of Elizabeth. She did not resent this particularly, and there was no real reason to believe he had done it, but she had refused to enter the store after this idea had come to her. Joe Pete had to bring all the groceries that they needed. When Joe Pete saw her motioning to him, he looked at Mr. Vargatte, who was behind the counter. Mr. Vargatte nodded and Joe Pete went out to see what she wanted. What she said excited him. She told him that Big John had not been able to start his engine. Not knowing what else to do, he had finally taken his skiff and was rowing the eight miles to town with the mail. He had firmly refused to add to his tardiness by taking any passengers with him.

It was imperative that he should go "light." She now suggested that Joe Pete might get away from his work in the store for this one day and row her up to town.

Immediately Joe Pete wished to go. He was sure that he could easily row that distance, and she had never asked him to go with her before. He also knew that if his mother failed to deliver her baskets on time the proprietor of the Green Front would not take them at all. That, in turn, meant that Mabel would have to tramp about the town to sell her baskets to people who were constantly being asked to buy baskets, and she was not strong enough now to endure such tramping. He was sure that Mr. Vargatte would understand the situation and would let him go for the day. He had never asked to get away.

Having spoken to Mr. Vargatte and obtained the desired permission without question, they set out. It was a perfect day, without a sign of wind, and the water was blue and silky-smooth. Joe Pete rowed with the short, steady Indian stroke that ends in a quick pull, which Big John had taught him long ago. Mabel steered with the paddle end of a broken oar, and their speed was surprising. In less than three hours, even with the current against them all the way, they were pulling in to the dock at the lower end of the town. Big John's skiff was already fastened there and he had gone into town on the street car.

As they tied their boat, Joe Pete immediately noticed a trim, immaculately white cruiser lying at the dock. It was not a large boat, but the lines were beau-

tiful, and the bow was clean-cut. He was attracted by a name written in gold letters on her bows—"Zheshebe Minis"—which he knew was Indian for Duck Island. He helped his mother out with her baskets and went up the dock with her, as far as the street which led to the city. There she told him to return to the dock and gave him her parting directions. He had wanted to go up the street with her, but she did not want him to go into the town for fear he might get lost, and she did not wish him with her. He was not particularly disappointed. There was so much to see at the dock that was strange to him. She told him to wait there for her until Big John came down with the mail in the afternoon. If she had not come by that time, Joe Pete was to leave their skiff for her and return to the Island with Big John. He would not be in such a hurry going back and would be willing to carry Joe Pete with him. She would row down later when she had finished her business with the Green Front man. The current would be with her, and the rowing would be easy on the homeward trip. Joe Pete agreed absently. As soon as she was out of sight, he returned to his absorbed inspection of the cruiser again. What a beautiful boat it was! He stared entranced at her, all shining white with brass trimmings. He had never thought anything could be so clean and perfectly kept. He treasured all the details of its perfection in his mind to tell the children when he returned home.

As he stood watching, an Indian whom he had seen at the store several times during the winter came down

the dock and climbed up on the cruiser, disappearing into a little room where the engine was. Joe Pete wished that the Indian had remembered him and had invited him to follow. Then he saw a group of people coming toward him. He stepped aside to allow them to pass, gazing at them intently, for it was all very fascinating to a boy who was unused to seeing white people, and strange to the noises and sights of town life. Two women and a man boarded the cruiser and sat in deck chairs behind the covered cabin. After these came two more men. One, Joe Pete thought, was evidently a stranger, for he was asking many questions, and he was interested in everything as if it were all new to him. He was tall; he stooped a little; he spoke in a pleasant voice.

Joe Pete could not help looking at the other man. He thought at first glance that the man was an Indian. He was lithe and as straight and brown as Joe Pete himself. He appeared much taller than he really was. But it was when this man answered the questions of the first and Joe Pete heard his voice that he really stared. The man's eyes and voice held that mysterious, mystical something that Joe Pete had felt and heard when on windy nights he had stood out under his beloved, fighting, storm-bent pine. This man's eyes held the knowledge and understanding of many things. There was that too about his bearing that made Joe Pete think of the old wise ones of his tribe.

As the two men passed they looked at Joe Pete. Joe Pete's eyes were held by those of the brown man for

just one second; he looked deep into them and experienced a queer sensation, almost of shock, as he felt that this sun-bronzed man had full knowledge of him, too. They had passed by when the man who appeared to be a stranger dropped a coat which had been hanging loosely over his arm. Instantly Joe Pete sprang to pick it up, and handed it back to him with unconscious courtesy. It seemed as if he bowed, though he kept erect. The stranger looked at him again; then noticed his ragged clothing, and reached into his pocket. Swiftly the brown man put his strong fingers on the other man's arm, staying him. "No, Dean, no!" he said. "This boy is a pure-blood, a thoroughbred." His fingers, resting lightly on the dark coat of the other man, were like those sensitive, seeing fingers of the little blind Frank! He smiled at Joe Pete and an unspoken approbation went with the smile. With that, they too went on the cruiser. Joe Pete did not want to seem to stare at them. He turned away and moved over where a man was painting a boat which was pulled up high on the dock. He sat there and let his feet dangle over the water while he pondered this new word.

"Thor'bred! Thor'bred!" What did the word mean? And who was this man whose eyes could see through torn clothes and not-too-clean body to the real Joe Pete who lived deep inside? The real Joe Pete, whom even Big John, Jerry, and Mr. Vargatte had only occasionally glimpsed. He wanted to ask the man who was painting, but there was such a warmth and lightness inside him, conjured up by that new word, that

he was afraid the man would notice it. It was such a smooth running word that it must mean something fine. Maybe it meant the same as Big John's "Damn' fine feller!" He was so stirred that tears were close. Whatever the word might mean he knew it expressed himself—Joe Pete—the person he could not help being. He told himself he would hold on to the memory of that word and the look of those eyes.

The cruiser left the dock without a sound. Joe Pete scarcely heard, but the man who was painting looked up and watched her as she started down river in a wide, graceful curve. He looked at Joe Pete with interest, and Joe Pete smiled at him. He could have smiled at the whole world just then. Instantly the painter responded to that smile.

"I just heard Guv'ner Osborn tell that other fellow that you're a thoroughbred," he said. "That man that dropped the coat is called Dean. He is a teacher or professor in some big college down state, and—"

Joe Pete made a great effort to wait, but could not. This man had repeated the word. He interrupted the garrulous flow of talk. "What is 'thor'bred'?" he asked eagerly.

"By gosh," said the painter fervently, "don't you know? It means that you ain't no mixture of breeds. You're all one kind, and guessing from the smile the Guv'ner gave you, it's the best kind there is!"

Joe Pete waited without impatience. He could have waited forever, pondering happily the painter's explanation. Big John was impatient, though, and said they

must start. They told the boathouse man that Mabel would take the skiff later. Joe Pete would have liked to tell his big friend what Governor Osborn had said, but he was too shy. He and Big John began the long row back to the Island.

The sun was setting when they reached the Settlement. Joe Pete went with Big John when he carried the mail to the store. He waited while Mr. Vargatte sorted it and put it in the proper boxes and compartments. Then he bought a few things they needed. Mr. Vargatte asked him if he had had a good time and had liked the town. Joe Pete smiled and said he had, but he did not stay to talk about it. He hurried along the trail homeward. It was getting dark and Katie—like all Indian women—dreaded going on any trail through the woods after dark. Though she was fairly sure that the tales of the old ones were not true, she hated to take any chances since they might possibly have some truth in them. She did not want a tree fiend to catch her alone in the woods at night. She went as soon as Joe Pete arrived, hardly waiting until he deposited his burden. Frank and Abe were delighted to have him back. He did not tell them that Mabel was not coming, and they did not seem to notice that she had not returned with him. He gave them some food, and while they ate, he told them about the shining boat with its Indian name written in gold letters on the bows. Then he helped Frank to bed. They had played all day and were tired. Soon they went to sleep, and the cabin was quiet again.

Night came rapidly, and with it came coolness that was grateful to Joe Pete. He wrapped his mother's sweater about him and sat in the doorway watching the shadows deepen around the cabin. The stars appeared one by one as the darkness thickened. Not a sound came from the woods or disturbed the quiet of the little clearing. The stars hung low and intimate. One seemed to have caught and stuck in the top branches of the spruce trees before the door. Mabel did not come. An owl hooted softly from the woods. Joe Pete felt as though he were the only person left in all the world, sitting on a hill-top all alone.

Old night-witch tales came back to him, that his mother had told him years ago, and he began to feel lonely and just a little bit afraid. He wanted to do as he had done when he was a small boy: go indoors and shut the night out. But the cabin was so hot, so close, and unaired; when the door was open, Frank slept better. He was getting sleepy—so sleepy. Mr. Vargatte had told him there were no more witches and werewolf women, but on such a black night as this there might be one lone one prowling. What was the word? "Thor'bred!" That was it. "Thor'bred! Thor'bred! Thor'—"

His head drooped lower and lower, and his tired eyes closed. He slid down on the floor near the doorway and slept.

Mabel stumbled over him there when she came staggering home, belated and penniless, as the first red rays of dawn shot through the sky. Charlotte Shegahg followed her in.

XX

SAM DECIDES FOR JOE PETE

It was three months before Jaakkola returned to the Island, and when he came he brought ten families of his own race with him. They came without ostentation, quietly, almost furtively, and settled on the homesteads far back in the woods in the middle of the Island, those that Jaakkola had procured for Miss Marks, who in turn sold them to these settlers. They seemed to be inoffensive people, uninquisitive, unable to speak English; not at all like Jaakkola. No one objected to their coming, because no one wanted the old abandoned homesteads, and no one was upset about someone's else wanting them. Jaakkola interpreted their wants to Mr. Vargatte and paid for what they bought at the store. All they took with them to their new homes—the long-deserted, dilapidated log cabins of former attempts to win a livelihood from the sterile Island soil—was food and some blankets, which both men and women carried in packs on their backs like the Indians themselves. The women were huge-bodied and as muscular as their men. They had fair, greasy hair, which hung in untidy lengths about their red faces. They seemed entirely indifferent to any physical discomfort. As soon as they had gone out of sight of the

Settlement, they removed their shoes and walked barefoot the remaining distance.

Jaakkola congratulated himself that he had driven in this entering wedge without causing any comment, and did not know that Jerry, Mr. Vargatte, Big John, and one other, who watched secretly and alone, were following every move he made with alarmed interest. Jerry even spoke about the situation that was sure to evolve to some of the city officials, who laughed at him and told him he was getting upset about nothing. They declared that Jaakkola was a fine fellow who would do lots for the Island and it was time they had someone there who was up and coming. Jerry saw it was useless to say more just at that time. But through friends in the office he discovered that Jaakkola had bought up titles to five or six of the best Indian farms for himself, and had investigated many homesteads for others of his race who were coming later. He estimated that Jaakkola was preparing to bring in at least fifty or sixty more families during the next year. When he told the other two interested men, Big John looked glum and asked morosely what could be done to prevent this—but neither of them knew.

A very short time following his return to the Island, and as though the coming of those of his own race gave him the courage to do it, Jaakkola moved from the shack which had belonged to White Loon to the cabin which had been Sam's and Charlotte's. Word went around that he was cutting pulpwood there, stripping every tree from the place. And as if he had in some

mysterious manner heard the news, Sam came again to the Island and lived in White Loon's shack which had been vacated by Jaakkola. This shanty was situated on the edge of the Settlement with the forest close behind it and was an ideal strategic point from which Sam heard promptly of anything that happened in the village and in the woods camps, and it was also a place from which he could make a speedy escape into the woods if that became necessary. Once in the woods, no one could find Sam unless he wished to be found. When Jaakkola was aware that Sam was back again he walked warily both by day and night and went less often to Mabel's cabin. Joe Pete did not know why he was not coming as frequently as had been his habit, but he was glad to see less of him.

Frank and Abe had started to school. Abe was delighted with everything that happened there and behaved himself passably well, partly because he was very fond of Miss Delaramie, and partly because he was afraid that she would send him away from this happy place if he did not conduct himself so as to win her approval. Frank was as timid as Joe Pete had expected him to be, but he was sustained by the presence of the other two. All the children were kind to him, for they had been previously warned by Miss Delaramie about his blindness and shyness. She felt hopeful that he would outgrow his nervousness and that in time she would be able to teach him a little.

Several of the foreign children who belonged to the nearer of the new settlers came to school. They did

not know how to speak with the other children, and seemingly did not like to speak their own language. But at the end of three or four months Miss Delaramie was amazed to hear them suddenly break out into understandable speech. They were rather wooden, well-behaved youngsters, and the native children were inclined to be friendly with them. But they were satisfied to stay by themselves.

Joe Pete still worked in the store every night after school was dismissed, and all day on Saturday. He sent Frank and Abe home with one of Mary's older children who went the same way they did. Mr. Vargatte did not lower his wages, even though he could not put in so much time at the store as he had during summer vacation. When Joe Pete offered to give back part of his money the first week of school, Mr. Vargatte laughed and refused to take it.

"Why, Joe Pete," he said, "I could not now get along without you. You are the best chore boy I have ever had in the store, and I can trust you with anything. You can work a little later on Saturday nights when we are so busy, if you feel that you must."

Joe Pete looked at him. "I will work hard, me," he said.

"You are working hard," Mr. Vargatte answered him. "You are earning every cent you get. I would miss you much if for any reason you went away."

Joe Pete had come to understand the Frenchman fully, and he knew Mr. Vargatte would not say this to him unless he meant what he said. He could not have

taken the money if he had felt that Mr. Vargatte was giving it to him because he was sorry for him. And he needed the money badly. Charlotte had not gone away again after she had come from town with Mabel, and the two women did just enough weaving to afford an excuse to go up to town occasionally. Joe Pete became accustomed to Mabel's staying for two or three days every time she went. There was no talk about it between them. She came and went as she pleased, and she had lost all her dread of the town. He did not argue with her even when she and Charlotte drank continuously from the bottle that was now never very far from them. There were many times when the whole situation seemed so hopeless to him that he felt he could not return to it after his work was finished for the day. He knew now why the men came from the camps to his mother's cabin, and was old enough to be ashamed to the depths of him. Every day he saw Mabel grow more careless until her pride completely vanished. The cabin was uncared for and dirty most of the time. This worried him, but he was too weary to clean it after working all day. None of this seemed to bother Mabel, neither the dirt nor his very evident distress. She and Charlotte sat and giggled foolishly as they talked loudly about disgusting things that Joe Pete loathed. He knew too that Mabel was a very sick woman. She did not have enough energy to keep herself clean, and looked frowsy and unkempt. She coughed constantly. Her skin was covered with repulsive sores and abrasions that would not heal. Only

the roughest of the camp men came to the cabin to visit her. There were times when Joe Pete forgot that she was his mother—in fact, hated the thought that one so alien in thought and feeling could be his mother—and despised her. Mabel in turn disliked him. He had developed a certain lean hardness that made her think of his father, and she did not want to remember Joe Shingoos.

One day when Joe Pete felt that he could not endure the sight of the two women together another minute, he went to Sam's shack to talk with him. Sam happened to be home. Without preface Joe Pete asked him to take Charlotte away from his mother's cabin. Sam laughed his ugly laugh. He was suspicious of the motives even of this boy whom he had seen cruelly tested. "Why you want Charlotte go 'way?" he asked, and his face was sneering as he brought it close to Joe Pete's and stared into his eyes.

Joe Pete did not draw back. "I hate her, me," he answered, also using English because he knew Sam had deliberately used it to affront him.

"Why you hate him?" insisted Sam. Joe Pete's unusual frankness intrigued him.

The boy was puzzled again by the question. Why did he hate Charlotte? Why had he always hated her? And now that his mother had become like Charlotte he was coming to hate her too!

"I do not know, Sam," he said, speaking unconsciously in Indian again. "When Charlotte is in our cabin, my mother is different. They two are now be-

come like those heartless women that Big John told me about, who long ago in time of famine killed and ate their old mothers rather than die a clean death of starvation on the trail. I cannot explain, Sam, but—”

Sam interrupted him, also using Indian. The boy's answer was as it should be. He was no longer surly or sneering. “I will take her away, Joe Pete. She shall come and live with me.”

Though Sam had a reputation for dishonesty, Joe Pete trusted him to keep his word; and the next day Charlotte went with Sam to his shack. The situation at Mabel's was not remedied by her going. Mabel was still lazy and dirty, but at least there was one less to feed from Joe Pete's wages.

When Sam told Big John what Joe Pete had asked him to do, Big John went to Mabel's cabin on Sunday when he knew Joe Pete would have time to talk with him. He knew that the boy must be desperately worried and discouraged, or he would never have asked that favor from Sam. Big John had something to propose to Joe Pete and thought this would be the best time to do it. He asked the boy to accompany him as far as a big birch tree which was deeply cut with many queer figures by passing Indians and which was called, for some unknown reason, the “witness tree.” Joe Pete wondered what Big John had on his mind, but willingly went with him. After they had gone a safe distance from the cabin, Big John began to talk. He told Joe Pete what he had heard from Jerry about Jaakkola's land deals and explained what the foreigner's intention

was toward the Island Indians. Soon there would be but a few Indians left on their Island if Jaakkola continued to take the land. The only remedy that Big John could suggest was that some one of the tribe should plainly portray the predicament of the Indians to the city officials and have Jaakkola's activities stopped by law. He was naïve enough to believe that they would act favorably to the Indians if they could only be made to understand the seriousness of the circumstances. But it was necessary that an Indian with education should do the talking—one who could talk as white men talked—for he knew the average white man could never get the Indian viewpoint if it were explained by the average Indian.

Planning for all this that he was proposing to Joe Pete, one day when he was in town he had spoken to the Probate Judge, who was a friend of his, about getting Joe Pete into a school for Indians which was located in the southern part of the state. If Joe Pete were willing to go, the Judge would arrange the matter. Because Joe Pete was a full-blood Indian it would cost nothing for him to attend this school. Even in one year he might learn so rapidly that he would be able to speak cunningly and impressively to the whites and obtain from them the land grants of the Island for the tribe, as had been given in the Canadian reservations just across the river. While Joe Pete was away at this school, Big John promised to see that Mabel and the children had enough to eat. He explained that he would like to take them into his own home only there

were too many living in his house now. Joe Pete was solemn at the mighty prospect ahead of him. It was his first inkling of Big John's plans for him. "Why do not you yourself explain, Big John?" he asked. "You are well known in the town and can make great talk."

"I have tried, my Joe Pete," said Big John simply, shaking his shaggy head hopelessly. "Over and over again have I told them; but I am not the one. I am too old to learn their ways of talking, and my tongue does not speak clearly enough to make them see. It is you who must do it. You must fight for your tribe, but you must first learn to fight as the white does, with great words."

"Think not that I do not desire to go, Big John," said the boy thoughtfully. "I want greatly to go, as you must know. But I cannot leave my small Frank with our mother. She hates us all now, but more than Abe or me does she hate the blind one. If I left him for even one year with her alone," he hesitated, then finished quickly, "there would be no Frank when I came home again."

Never had he been so outspoken about his home conditions, nor had he ever told Big John how he felt toward his mother; but he knew now that he must speak with his big friend without any reservations or he would be misunderstood.

Big John attacked him from another angle. "Your own taxes are unpaid, Joe Pete. That black Jaakkola will buy them and drive you out. In one year, if you

worked hard and learned much, you might do this thing."

Joe Pete shook his head. "I have three years before he can own," he said. "Mr. Vargatte has told me the law. By working hard I may pay the taxes within the time."

"The sheriff is the law," Big John urged, "and he long ago said to me that with education you might go far—far. Will you do it, my Joe Pete? You wish to go. I know how you greatly need to go. Will you take this chance?"

Joe Pete almost pleaded. "Yes, I do wish to go. But let me think, Big John, let me think more about it. I will tell you on Tuesday, that day you must speak with the Judge."

Big John left him then without further discussion or insistence. He knew the boy would do that which he decided was right, and no urging would change that decision. He could only leave it for him to think over and choose his own course. Big John knew as well as the boy did, that, if Joe Pete went, there would be no Frank to greet him when he returned—even after one year. Joe Pete's love for him was the force that kept Frank going; without him Frank could not have borne his life with Mabel. Neither of them even thought about Abe or felt any worry for him. He was strong and hard, and according to Indian ideas, could now bear want and cold as Joe Pete had borne both at his age. Frank was the deciding factor. If Joe Pete could force himself to be willing to offer up the blind child

whom he adored as an immediately certain sacrifice to the uncertain future welfare of the tribe, Big John knew they could send him away with a much-desired goal in view that would indeed carry him far. But the decision was now for Joe Pete to make—and Big John was not sure of the result.

When Joe Pete reached the cabin again, Mabel had gone over to visit Charlotte. Frank and Abe were alone. Joe Pete was glad of the quiet and sat down on the doorsill to think. Frank came over to him and sat as close as he could. Abe went on playing. Near the well-box was some soft, sticky clay, and he was shaping some grotesque little figures out of it that amused him immensely. Joe Pete looked at him, then at Frank. Abe did not need him any longer. Though Joe Pete might pass out of his life entirely, Abe would in some way manage to get enough food and shelter to exist. He was of the kind that takes what he wants. Joe Pete gazed at Frank, and as though he had felt the glance, Frank leaned toward him and asked softly, "What is it, my Joe Pete? Do you wish Frank to do something for you?"

Joe Pete answered, and there was misery in his tone. "No, my small one. No. I am thinking my trail through a hard tangle, and the shadows are so deep I cannot see clearly."

Frank kept silent, waiting patiently for Joe Pete to speak with him again when he had finished thinking; but Joe Pete could not come to a decision with Frank there in his sight. He wanted to go to this school more

than anything else he had ever desired. It was a way out of this miserable situation, and he was eager to learn everything there was to be learned. For a whole year, or longer if he chose, he would not have to live in this filthy cabin. There would be no responsibility felt for the blind child, nor any correcting of Abe, who stole everything he could put his hands on. He was weary of the degradation of watching his mother coming stumbling homeward along the trail. He hated to see her in such bad physical condition and dreaded what she might yet become. He reached into his pocket and closed his fingers around the white lamb marble which he carried with him as a talisman, hoping it might help him.

As he sat there trying to make his decision, he saw Jaakkola coming out of the words at quite a distance from the place where the trail led out into the clearing. He was looking back over his shoulder into the forest as he came. Following his gaze, Joe Pete caught a momentary glimpse of a man's figure melting into the green haze of leaves and shadows. Jaakkola came toward them, swearing vilely half under his breath as he came. From his very violence Joe Pete somehow sensed the fact that Jaakkola was scared. Jaakkola scared! The thought of it made a wave of silent laughter run through Joe Pete. By the time Jaakkola reached them the desire for laughter had passed and he was serious enough. It was unbelievable that Jaakkola could be afraid. He was bigger than any man on

the Island except Big John. Jaakkola said to him furiously, "Where is your mother?"

"She is with Charlotte," Joe Pete answered, wondering if the scene, which had once begun with these same words long ago, was to be repeated. But for the time Jaakkola had forgotten the issue between them.

"I will sit here a minute and wait for her," he said.

"She will not be home until night," Joe Pete volunteered tentatively. The big foreigner was certainly acting queerly today, almost as if he were glad to sit with Joe Pete for a time. Jaakkola looked at him questioningly, then got up to go. "Tell her that I want to see her tomorrow," he said. "Tell her I will come some time in the afternoon, and she must be here." He started to go, his eyes searching the woods ahead. He had just disappeared from sight down the trail when Joe Pete saw a figure emerge from the woods and follow silently. He knew it was Sam. No one else could walk as Sam did, without treading on a single dry noisy leaf and avoiding snappy twigs and loose little stones. Again Joe Pete wondered. But he was too busy with his own problem and its solution. He forgot the episode.

When he came home after work the next day, Jaakkola was there sitting in the cabin talking to Mabel. They had evidently been quarrelling about something, for Mabel was surly. Neither spoke to Joe Pete when he entered, but Jaakkola continued his complaining to Mabel, and she stared at Joe Pete from half-closed,

ugly eyes, as though she did not want him to listen. When he encountered her glance the boy realized to the full how she had changed in her feeling toward him. There was no mother-sentiment left in her. To get away from her stare he went into the little inner room and lighted his lamp, for the inner room had no window. There was a broken chair leaning against the wall and he dropped wearily into it, hoping to think through his problem.

As he went over it again and again, he could not eliminate entirely from his mind the strange look his mother had given him. It was as though she had been looking at a stranger—an alien. He felt that Jaakkola, a white, was more to her now than he himself was, and his misery increased. He wondered how it had all come about: how her feeling for him could have changed from love to what was almost hatred, and how his feeling for her had likewise changed. He defended himself to himself. He was not patterning his ways after those of his white friends; she thought he was, but she was mistaken. Through his reverie he heard occasional words from the other room. Jaakkola was speaking loudly. Joe Pete caught snatches against his will. "That damned Indian trailing me always . . ." "He comes from nowhere and goes back into nowhere again . . ."

Joe Pete went deep into his thinking, and the words faded out of his hearing for a few moments, then broke through again. "When I woke I felt someone was in the room with me, and turned the flashlight straight on

Sam"—"Like a ghost he comes through locked doors"—Joe Pete listened, uninterested, to the mumble of words and Mabel's indifferent answers. What was making the surly Jaakkola so talkative tonight? He only half heard the question put to Mabel by Jaakkola, and left unanswered by her—"How did he get in, I ask you? The door was locked: how could he enter?"—

Joe Pete again became immersed in his own perplexities. He tried to analyze his actions. He decided that he was simply making the best of his life. He could not rid himself of the remembrance of his mother's eyes. They were so cold, so hard as they stared at him. He stood up, wanting the comfort of his pine tree, and then bethought himself that he had to pass Mabel and Jaakkola again to get out to it. How he hated Jaakkola! He was to blame for the change in his home and in his mother, and now he wanted their land. It was getting late. Surely he would soon go home.

There was a dusty, ragged overcoat hanging on the wall. Joe Pete knew it had belonged to his father. He went over to it and some impulse of longing for this father he could not remember moved him to press his cheek against it. Under the overcoat there was something hanging that felt hard against his face. He lifted the garment from the nail on which it had dangled since Joe Shingoos went away, and saw a gun, hung downward over the same nail. His father had forgotten to take it with him. Wonderingly he took it in his hands and examined it. The barrel was dusty and covered with rust. Big John had shown him how to shoot when

he was small. He opened the gun and found there was a cartridge still in the barrel. Something about the look of it there sent a thrill through him. Through the thin door between the two rooms he was suddenly conscious of Jaakkola's saying good-bye to his mother as he opened the outside door to leave the cabin. Then, evidently at sight of something outdoors, Jaakkola swore viciously. One would think he already owned the place. A rush of hatred for this foreigner came over Joe Pete. If this man had not come to the Island things would be as they always had been. He had stirred up trouble where there had never been trouble before. Joe Pete looked at the gun in his hands. Then he remembered the two dreadful beatings this man had given him. No one knew that the gun was in the cabin, not even his mother. Big John wanted him to go away to school to learn enough to rid the Island of Jaakkola and the other whites who were coming here because of him. The little, blind Frank must be offered up as a sacrifice to the tribe because of the foreigner. That must not happen for Joe Pete could not bear to part with Frank. There was an easier way here in his hand. He would follow Jaakkola a short distance down the trail away from their cabin so his mother would not hear, and then shoot him. No one would ever know who had killed him; the Island would be rid of Jaakkola forever; he would still have Frank, and they might all be happy again.

He heard the outer door close with a bang. He suddenly decided to do this thing. He went silently

through the outer room. Mabel was preparing to go to bed and did not look at him. He opened the door very softly and went out. For just a moment she was startled and looked after him, but the door swung shut on loose hinges. The moon was at the full, and Joe Pete watched Jaakkola slowly crossing the clearing. Soon he would reach the shadow of the woods and then it would be too late to shoot. Joe Pete followed a short distance, then lifted the gun and took deliberate aim. Jaakkola stopped just at that instant, removed his cap, and ran his fingers through his long, always greasy hair. The moonlight shone directly down upon him and the black hair glistened in the light, offering a sure target. For just an instant Joe Pete closed his eyes, praying for greater courage than he yet possessed, and in that instant a thin, strong hand gripped his shoulder from behind. His eyes flew open. He turned swiftly, his first instinct always to bite the hand which gripped him, and as he turned he looked straight into the black eyes of Sam—who grinned at him.

“So,” drawled Sam deliberately, softly, still grasping him, “our Joe Pete goes hunting in the moonlight.”

The boy released himself from Sam’s hold. Sam continued coolly, “The black foreigner is mine, Joe Pete, and I will have no interference.” Then more kindly, “We do not want gun noise in this, Joe Pete. It is my affair. I am the robbed one, and I will do this in my own way.”

The gun fell out of the boy’s hands. He sat down on the dew-wet ground and covered his face. Again

his throat tightened and he began to tremble. He had almost shot a man. If Sam had not interfered, the foreigner walking down the trail would have been by now without motion—lying cold on the earth—like the old Nokomis of long ago.

Because of this agitation Sam believed he had humiliated Joe Pete. He consoled him as well as he knew how. "I know you too are robbed, Joe Pete," he admitted, "and I know too what Big John would demand of you. But I am the older one, and know better than Big John how to deal with this coward who steals from us under cover of the law. When you have become older you shall do the fighting—but not with guns, Joe Pete—with silence. Silence that holds a threat."

Joe Pete sat quiet and did not answer. He was still ill from the thought of what he might have done, yet Sam's words had taken a load from his mind. Sam stooped and with surprising strength lifted him easily and set him on his feet.

"Go home now, little fullblood, and do not worry," he said gently. "Sam will take this one burden from your shoulders in his own time and in his own way."

He lifted the gun from the ground, handed it to the boy, gave him the Indian sign of respect and farewell, and vanished down the trail before Joe Pete could realize that he had made a single retreating movement. In an instant Joe Pete lost sight of him.

Joe Pete went to the big pine and leaned against it. Sam had decided his problem for him this time. Sam would settle with Jaakkola in his own time and his own

way. Softly the boy whispered to his old tree friend, "I shall stay! I shall stay with my small blind one!" He thought the tree bent toward him gladly and answered in a faint, whispered, sibilant echo of his own words—"Shall stay! Shall stay!"

Comforted and relieved of his load of trouble, he returned to the cabin.

XXI

JERRY'S PLANS

How he did it no one ever knew, but Sam fulfilled his promise to Joe Pete, for Jaakkola never came again at night to Mabel's cabin during the next winter, and seldom by daylight unless he was passing on an errand. When he did come he was as oblivious of Joe Pete as if the boy were not in the house. The trouble between them seemed to be forgotten by the foreigner, as though he had other, more important matters which must be settled first. He had developed a furtive habit of always looking carefully ahead and around him before he re-entered the woods which enclosed Mabel's clearing. He had lost some of his stoutness, and much of his insolent arrogance. There were whispers going around that he was beating his wife openly, while his two big boys stolidly sat by and refused to interfere for their mother. There were weeks at a time when he did not appear at the cabin at all.

Mabel did not seem to miss him. She welcomed him indifferently when he appeared and was equally indifferent when he went. He was often ugly with her and struck her occasionally. Even this she did not resent openly, for she knew that it would take very little rebellion from her now to drive him away; and she needed

the whisky he shared with her more than she needed the small amounts of money he doled out to her spasmodically. She had given up trying to weave. Her fingers had permanently stiffened until they had become as unwieldy as claws and almost as useless. Her entire body became infected from the skin sores which would not heal. She was shaken and torn with constant coughing. The men from the camps went elsewhere. She earned no money all winter, and they had to depend entirely on the wages Joe Pete got in the store. Luckily they had a stock of half-worn clothing that Mabel had taken at times from the whites in payment for her baskets. If Joe Pete had had to buy clothing as well as food from his wages, he could never have managed to support them. He realized that his mother was very ill and honestly tried to be kind to her, but she refused to accept his ministrations. The medicines and salves which he brought from the store she petulantly threw into the fire, so after a time he ceased worrying about her stubbornness and let her use the ointments she got from the Indian medicine-man.

Sam remained in the Settlement. Few people saw him, even among the Indians, but they knew he was still there because there were times late in the night when a light flamed in White Loon's shack. No one knew where he obtained food, nor could they foretell his erratic movements. Those who used the trails at night often had a vague sensation that a thick shadow had suddenly come to life and stepped from the path just in front of them, waiting until they passed, and

then after a time falling in again behind them. But they saw nothing definite and had a feeling that there was no menace to them in this chance apparition. Joe Pete saw him more often than any other of the tribe, for Sam did not hesitate to join the boy as he walked home after work in the evenings. They did not talk much with each other, for there was now an understanding between them that was beyond any need of words. They both knew that for as long a time as Sam could continue his harrowing of Jaakkola without molestation from the law, Joe Pete would have respite from worry or decision, and neither knew just how long a time that might be. But at least Sam was keeping Jaakkola from the cabin. This was a relief to Joe Pete; for ever since Mr. Vargatte's warning to him about a possible hurt to Frank from Jaakkola, it had worried him constantly every time he was forced to leave the blind child alone with Abe in the cabin.

When the temperature dropped below zero and hung there for days at a time, Frank could not endure the cold. He had to leave school and remain home with a very negligent Mabel. Joe Pete noticed every night when he returned to them that Frank was a little more listless, a little more silent. He finally bribed Abe to stay home also to keep Frank company.

Then there came a night when Joe Pete came home and found Frank white and ill and unable to get out of bed, almost too weak to smile at him. He had been lying there uncared for all day, for Abe did not know what to do. Desperately Joe Pete questioned Mabel as

to what could be done to relieve the sick child, but she shook her drunken head and would not answer. Joe Pete looked at her and could not keep the disgust and hatred that he felt for her out of his eyes. She saw it naked there, but only grinned foolishly. Joe Pete turned to Frank. He was hot and feverish and begged Joe Pete to sit near him and talk with him. Abe volunteered the information that Frank had been drinking much water all day.

To distract the sick boy's mind Joe Pete took from the pocket, where he always carried it, his talisman, the white lamb marble. He placed it gently in Frank's thin fingers, and let him feel the coolness of it. As the blind child held it, Joe Pete described the small, beribboned lamb that stood all white and still inside the glass, as soft and cool as the noiseless white snow that drifted deep against the cabin. Abe crept close to hear too, and admire the wonderful marble. Joe Pete let him hold the marble for a moment, then gave it again to Frank. Frank finally went to sleep holding it clasped tightly in his hand. A little later when Joe Pete had finished his chores, he gently moved the child to recover his marble; but it had disappeared. He thought it might have dropped behind the bed or rolled under the folds of the bed-coverings, and left it until morning. But the next day in spite of all his searching he could not find the marble. He asked Frank where he had put it, but Frank only replied that he had had it when he fell asleep and had wakened without it. He seemed so distressed when Joe Pete repeated his questions that Joe Pete refrained

from further talk about it. When Abe was questioned he declared that he had not touched it, but there was something in his face that convinced Joe Pete that Abe knew where the marble was. Joe Pete cross-questioned him and searched his clothes, but without result. The marble had disappeared. He wondered if his mother had thrown it out and ventured to ask her, but she said she had not seen it. He had come to attach such magical power to the marble that he was really frightened when it could not be found. Abe watched with evident interest while Joe Pete searched, but said nothing.

This loss of the marble meant so much to Joe Pete that he broke his natural reticence and confided his loss to Armand. Armand in turn told his father and asked whether they might not be able to get another marble for Joe Pete. Mr. Vargatte said he did not believe they could. But he was worried for he knew Joe Pete, and realized that the boy could bear no further strain, not even that of a lost talisman. He took from his watch chain a little horse-shoe which he had worn for years, and presented it solemnly to the boy, telling him that it was white man's magic, and therefore more powerful than the marble. Joe Pete's belief in charms was great. He hated to lose the marble, but he gladly accepted the substitute. Things seemed to go better with him after his acquisition of the horse-shoe charm. Frank grew well again, and Abe was better behaved and much gentler with Frank, as though there was somehow a bond between them that had not been there before his

illness. All of this helped, but Joe Pete was thin to gauntness when the winter was over.

The first mild days of spring seemed to him to be the loveliest he had ever known. They warmed his soul as well as his body. The fragile, pink-veined mayflowers that covered the ground, creeping delicately even across the trails, filled him with delight. His fine, thin nostrils dilated to admit into them all the fragrance of the new-growing woods. Added to this delight in the beauty of the spring was the infinite relief of knowing that Frank would no longer be cold because the wood that Joe Pete had brought into the cabin the night before might be too quickly used. The blind boy could at last get out on the doorsill and sit in the warm sun, away from his mother for a few moments. Joe Pete knew the child would be completely happy, just sitting there with his violin, listening to the songs of myriad, migrating birds.

Jerry met Joe Pete one Sunday morning on the trail near the clearing and invited him to accompany him as far as the hunting lodge. Joe Pete was glad to go, for he had not had a chance to talk with Jerry for a long time. They spoke of many things as they tramped. Jerry told the boy the English names of the birds they saw and talked casually of other things they observed. Joe Pete knew from the rather embarrassed way that Jerry looked at him from time to time that he had something definite to say to him, but was waiting for the right time. So the boy waited until Jerry was ready to tell him. They reached the small clearing where the

hunting lodge stood. Although it was not very far from his own home, Joe Pete seldom passed the place. Now, as he looked at it, memories of its interior came back to him, and he was curious to see the big living room. Jerry went directly to the door and pulled a key from his pocket. Joe Pete looked at him.

"Yes," Jerry answered the questioning glance, "we are going in this time and give the place the once-over."

The door stuck and resisted his efforts, but Jerry persisted. Finally it swung back. Joe Pete had forgotten how large the living room was, but he had not forgotten the big stone fireplace. Jerry brought in some kindling from the kitchen and began to build a fire in the grate. "Look around and see how you like it," he said. "Take a look upstairs too, while I light this. I want to see how the thing draws."

Joe Pete willingly did as Jerry suggested, though he wondered somewhat at the casualness of it all. The lodge was perfectly familiar to him, and there was an atmosphere about it that made him think of the living room of the Vargattes'. He wondered what it was that made the homes of whites different from those of Indians. There was nothing in Mrs. Vargatte's home that any Indian might not have, yet it was not like any Indian home he had ever seen. He was pondering over this when Jerry called him and he put the question to Jerry.

"Why is this different from our Indian houses, Jerry? This is like the home of the Vargattes."

"It's hard to say, Joe Pete," Jerry answered him

seriously enough, though the question struck him as being funny. "White women have a knack of fixing things, and I guess they make the most of what they've got. Most Indian women don't care what their houses look like, as long as they're warm."

Joe Pete answered thoughtfully, "I think maybe the Indian women have had no one to show them how to keep a house. When they lived in wigwams, Big John says, they kept them clean. Now they must be busy always weaving, for they have now to have money. When no one used money, Big John also told me, there was time for beautiful basket weaving."

"You're getting off the track, Joe Pete," laughed Jerry, "but I think I know what you mean. You're trying to solve the problem of the modern Indian. You're too young yet, and haven't had enough experience, but it's a problem that's going to be forced on you pretty soon, so keep thinking about it, son."

Joe Pete nodded.

Jerry continued, diffidently, yet quickly, now that the conversation had begun. "You know, Joe Pete, I'm buying this place. I can get it dirt cheap because nobody wants it, and it's a mighty good, well-built house. Warm and solid, too. I'm going to marry Miss Delaramie as soon as school lets out, and we're going to live here."

"You mean she will not teach the school any more again here?" Joe Pete interrupted, feeling as though something solid had been suddenly pulled from under his feet, leaving him dangling over space.

Jerry saw that Joe Pete was taking his news hard. He went close to the boy and put an arm around his shoulders. "I know it's hard on you, Joe Pete. They'll never get another teacher like her. But there's something harder yet that I've got to tell you." He hesitated. "I don't know how to—"

"Tell it, Jerry, tell it quickly," begged the boy. He felt the old tightening of his throat and was afraid that he might betray it to Jerry. It was best to have bad news quickly told, and gotten over the sooner.

Jerry tightened his grip on the lad's shoulders, and looked straight into his eyes. "Well, here it is then," he said. "In the fall I'm going down into the lower part of the state, and Miss Delaramie, of course, will come with me. We'll live here just for the summer; then I've got to go south."

Joe Pete turned so white that Jerry was frightened and led him over to a chair. What would he do without these two friends who were so dear to him? He had always had Jerry, ever since he could remember. He had never quite realized how much he had grown to love him and depend on him. What would his life be without the kind watchfulness and interference of Jerry? With Miss Delaramie gone also, there would be an end to his extra studying and help from her. She had given him so much of her fineness and had so satisfied his hunger for this side of life that for a while he could not face the thought of getting along without her. Yet he knew this thing would happen to him as inevitably as he knew the winter would come again.

Surely he had more than his share of hard things to bear! He shut his lips to keep back a sob. Jerry looked at him and knew that never again could he doubt the fact that Joe Pete loved them. He interrupted the boy's sad thoughts.

"When we go we want you to come with us and go to school down there. Jeanne will help you where you need help, and you will soon catch up with other kids your age. We've got it all planned—in fact, I had to plan it with her before she'd say she'd marry me. She thinks a lot of you, Joe Pete!"

Joe Pete only stared at him.

"We meant it, son," Jerry insisted. "We want you to have your chance and get away from here. Our home will be yours as long as you want to stay."

The boy shook his head dumbly.

"You know I feel just as Jeanne does, don't you, Joe Pete?" Jerry went on. "I couldn't think any more of a kid of my own than I do of you. I want you just as much as she does. My wages in this new job are big enough so we can give you a start."

Tears came into the boy's eyes, and he covered his face with his hands to hide them. There was nothing on earth that would mean quite so much to him as to live with these friends and go to school. How much he wanted to learn what these whites knew! How pleased Big John would be to have his desire for him come true—and through him his wish for the tribe. To learn the refinements of the whites, to be able to speak as they did, and through that learning explain to them

the Indian viewpoint and predicament, and obtain from them the remedy. All this was open to him with Jerry's offer. Also the chance to live as the whites did, to learn their ways, and in turn to teach the younger ones of his tribe to do the same. The younger ones would be willing to discard the old, useless ways of their fathers, keeping what was good and adjusting it to the new ways. All they needed was the chance and someone to show them the way. And he might be that one! This chance meant just that.

He was fairly ill with the swift desire for it all that flooded over him. He knew how empty life would be for him after these two went away from the Island. He had finished all the grades offered in the little school, and Miss Delaramie had planned to help him in the evenings with more advanced work. Jerry's enthusiastic voice again interrupted his musings.

"I sort of sounded your mother about it first, Joe Pete, and I don't think she'll care if you leave. And Big John is dead set on having you go ever since Mac-Donald told him you should. There's no real reason why you can't come with us."

"Yes, there is—there is, Jerry," the boy burst out. He knew Jerry was right when he said his mother would not care. He knew that Big John even could not fully understand his reason for refusing to go; and he hesitated to tell it to Jerry.

"I cannot leave my Frank. He would die, Jerry, if I left him. My mother does not like him—and a blind one needs much care."

"Nothing much can happen to him in one year, Joe Pete," protested Jerry, just as Big John had. "He could get along somehow while you went away for just one year."

"No, Jerry. I know my small Frank. He only lives for me, because I love him. I love him too much to leave him to die. And there is only my money now to buy food for all."

"Don't you want to go, Joe Pete? Are you just like all the rest of them?" Jerry asked. But at the look in the boy's eyes, he relented. "Oh, I know you want to go, son. But I'm hanged if I get your idea any more than Big John does. Never mind. I wish we could afford to keep them all so you could get away, but even at this new job they've given me, my wages wouldn't stand it." He patted Joe Pete's hand as though he were a small child again, and needed to be comforted. "You see, Joe Pete," he said frankly, "it's this way. My company's holdings here are all cut. I'll only be in town down there until they get hold of some more timber and ship me off somewhere else. I may not be able to offer you the chance again."

"I know, Jerry, I know," Joe Pete answered dolefully. "I cannot make you understand the way I feel about the small Frank, but I must not leave him."

"Jeanne will be mighty sorry," Jerry said quietly, seeing the trouble in the boy's face, "and if you change your mind come and tell me. There are still a couple of months before we go."

They sat a few minutes watching the fire glow and

die. Jerry had forgotten after all to notice whether or not there was a good draft. He poked through the ashes to see if there were any dangerous coals left alive, and then turned to Joe Pete again. "Promise me, son, that if you ever can get away you will come to us. Jeanne wants you to make something of yourself and so do I. If the time comes that you can get away, promise me you'll come. Let me take that much to her anyway."

Joe Pete promised gladly and tried to tell Jerry something of what his offer meant to him, but the words would not come.

"Never mind, old man," said Jerry understandingly. "I know what you'd like to say. And now I'll tell you something else; good news this time. Because you're different from the others, this lodge is to be yours any time you want it. Your cabin soon won't be fit to live in. I only bought this place to hold it for you, and I'll help you by paying the taxes on both this place and yours until you're able to pay me when you're grown up."

Joe Pete looked around the big room. His! It was unbelievable! What a friend Jerry was! Suddenly he reached for Jerry's hand and held it tight against his cheek, as he had done when he was a small child. He could do no more to express his gratitude and pleasure. Jerry was embarrassed. "Let's go," he said.

They locked the door carefully and started across the clearing toward Mabel's cabin. Joe Pete hoped Jerry might be coming home with him, but when they came to

the place where the trail forked into the woods and down to the Settlement, Jerry said good-bye. "I can't come in today," he said in explanation. "I'm going to meet Governor Osborn at the store to talk over a piece of land near his island that he wants to buy from the company. He will be along any minute now. You'll see him maybe when he passes your place." Again he said good-bye and left the boy standing on the trail watching him disappear down the aisle of trees.

Joe Pete could not bear to go home yet. Mabel was in one of her worst moods, but for once not even the thought of Frank could drag him back to the cabin. Neither could his love for Frank take the sting out of the feeling that a gift of proffered wings must remain useless to him because of the helplessness of the blind child. For a few minutes he knew hot resentment against Frank and Abe, and a bitter hatred toward his mother. She was leaving more responsibility to him every day. After all they were not his children! He did not want to be at the cabin when Governor Osborn passed. Others who came by stopped for a drink, and he might happen to stop for the same reason. Joe Pete felt that it would be unbearable to have this man, who had named him "thoroughbred," see the squalor of the place where he lived and the utter degradation and repulsiveness of his mother. What might his mother not say and do while she was in this ugly temper?

He quitted the trail where he had remained standing after Jerry left him, and went over to his big pine tree. He felt that it was far enough off the trail so no one

would break in on his solitude while he pondered this matter of going away to school once more. He wanted to hold it in his mind and dream about it for a little while before he gave it up. He lay on the ground under the tree, his hands under his head, and closed his eyes, hoping that eventually he might get relief from this tormenting, persistent desire to accept Jerry's offer and leave all his troubles behind.

For long slow minutes he pondered many things. Dim memories of Dawas came back to him; he had a vague feeling of knowing that Sara whom Sam had called by name on the night of the fire; he wondered about his father and where he might be; he thought of the high hopes held for him by Big John and wished with all his heart that he might satisfy them. Big John's ideas were not those of the whites, Mr. Vargatte had told him, and the Frenchman had also told him that to be fair-minded one must hold both views equally. If only Jerry could take Frank too, how glad Joe Pete would be to go with him. He knew if he told Frank about this chance that had come to him, Frank would tell him to go. He even pictured himself living in the hunting lodge with Frank and Abe. His mother was not in the picture.

He heard someone coming toward him. He was dismayed. No one ever came off the trail in this direction. But he had not taken into account this kind of person, nor did he know that the one who now came was also a lover of pine trees, and could not pass a big one on the trail. Joe Pete sat up and rubbed his eyes,

and there before him was the man who had named him thoroughbred.

"Good morning, Joe Pete," he greeted the boy.

Joe Pete could hardly answer for his amazement. Mr. Osborn remembered him—even knew his name. He jumped to his feet and started to go, ashamed of his blurred eyes, and also thinking this man might want to be alone with the pine which he so evidently loved. As though he had read his thought, Mr. Osborn spoke again, "Pardon me for intruding, but I always step off the trail to see this big tree. It is an old friend of mine."

"He is my friend too," answered the boy. "I come often to see him, me."

"Our mutual friend tells me that something is troubling you," said the Governor. "Could I help you in any way?" His eyes looked at Joe Pete, and again the boy had that sensation of shock as he met them and suddenly knew that this was a man who would understand anything he might tell him. Though Joe Pete might not think as he did, Mr. Osborn would know he was honest in what he believed. He knew that he could talk to this man as he had not spoken with his closest friends. And Joe Pete sadly needed to talk with someone. The eyes looked at him again and invited his confidence. Joe Pete broke into fluent speech.

"You know Jaakkola?" he asked, and then was ashamed of his question. Of course Mr. Osborn knew Jaakkola! He continued quickly. "Jaakkola is taking the Island for his own people and Big John is worried.

He demands that I go to school to learn to outwit such people."

The Governor nodded. "Big John is right. When do you go?" he asked.

"I cannot go, me," said Joe Pete, and was interrupted.

"Do not add 'me' to your sentence," said Mr. Osborn.

"I know," said the boy. "Miss Delaramie has told me many times, but sometimes I forget."

"Yes, we all forget sometimes," said Mr. Osborn. "Tell me just why you cannot go."

"It is this way," explained Joe Pete simply. "There is the blind Frank at home who needs me and I cannot leave him. And Big John does not know truly about those old treaties that the Indians made with the whites about the lands. He tells me that the treaties were only for a little while, like those the Indians made long ago with other Indians; but the whites knew that the treaties were to hold forever. Mr. Vargatte tells me the Indians may not have these lands again unless the white law gives them once more to the Indians, as is done in Canada."

He stopped talking and looked at Mr. Osborn as though asking if he were interested in all this talk of treaties. Mr. Osborn nodded in answer. So the boy told him of everything that had happened since Jaakkola came to the Island, even told him of the degradation of his mother and the intolerable situation at home. And with the telling of it he seemed somehow to be relieved

of the horror and the burden of it all, and the thing he had thought right for him to do now seemed doubly right. He had no more temptation to run away. He was made strong again, just as the pine tree had made him strong once before.

Finally he finished and Mr. Osborn got up to go. "Thank you, Joe Pete, for your confidence in me," he said. "Do the thing that seems right to you. If you need help, tell me, but I am sure you will work this problem out satisfactorily to yourself and all concerned. And I repeat that you are a thoroughbred." He offered his hand to the boy, held his for a moment in a firm, sincere grasp, then swung about swiftly and walked rapidly down the trail without looking back. Joe Pete watched him, and again his thoughts went back to those wise ones of his tribe who walked as this white man walked. Soon Mr. Osborn was hidden by a screen of trees, and Joe Pete turned toward his own cabin.

When Jerry next met Joe Pete and asked him whether he had changed his mind, the boy told him that he had decided to stay on the Island with Frank, unless a time came when he could take Frank away with him. "It will not be for so long as you think, Jerry," he said solemnly. "I have thought lately that the blind one felt my selfish wish to go away and is making ready to give me that chance I desired. Each day he grows thinner and has less strength—"

But the practical Jerry would not listen. "That is only some of your Indian superstition, Joe Pete," he

said, "and there's nothing in it. You have a month yet before we go. Come with us."

Joe Pete smiled and shook his head. It seemed that there were certain facts that only an Indian could see—this about Frank was one of them!

XXII

FLU

Joe Pete and Armand kept the store open while Theophile and Delima Vargatte went up to town with Miss Delaramie and Jerry to see them married. Joe Pete felt a peculiar mixture of sensations that day: one of intense pride that Mr. Vargatte would trust him with the store, and a melancholy feeling of loss when he remembered the reason why they had all gone to town. They had given Armand his choice of going with them or staying, but he had preferred to remain with Joe Pete. A day when the two might be together was bound to be a happy one for both.

And in spite of Joe Pete's feeling that he was losing Jerry and Miss Delaramie forever, the few months that they still remained on the Island were pleasant ones for all. Every time Jerry went to or from his new home in the hunting lodge, he passed Mabel's cabin. He was so happy that he was never too busy now to stop for a few minutes and visit with the children. He became very fond of Frank and began to understand why Joe Pete felt he could not go away and leave him. The blind boy was very frail. Even Abe held a warm place in Jerry's affections; the spanking given the day Jerry had caught him teasing Frank had made him into a

better boy, as Jerry often reminded him. Abe only looked at him and grinned impishly. He held not one bit of resentment or fear toward Jerry, and openly misbehaved before him if he felt inclined to do so.

Jerry could not see enough of Joe Pete, for he felt that their time together was limited. Joe Pete took Frank with him and they spent long, happy evenings with Jerry and his wife before the big stone fireplace. There was no reserve between them since Jerry's offer to Joe Pete, and they talked of his future constantly, planning this and that thing which he was sometime to accomplish; and underneath the talk ran the thread which held it all together, the land saved for the tribe.

Frank sat quietly by and listened, and understood more of their conversation than they dreamed. Though he was only two years younger than Joe Pete, because of his affliction, they still thought of him as a child. Jeanne was always kind to him and at times surprised a wistful, lost look in his face that wrung her heart with its sadness. Frank knew as well as they that there was nothing in life for him. And, somehow, watching his rapt, withdrawn expression, the idea came to her, as it had come to Joe Pete, that the blind boy was aware that he was soon to step out of Joe Pete's life in order to give this beloved older brother his chance, and that he was nerving himself to be willing to endure what he knew was to happen.

The summer passed too quickly. In September Jerry and Jeanne left the Island. They stopped in at the cabin to say good-bye to Mabel and the children. Mabel only

looked at them indifferently. Abe shook hands with both; then, as though good-byes were an everyday occurrence in his life, quite casually returned to his little images. His clay was of just the right consistency to work, and he did not want it to get dry again. Jerry shook hands with Frank and told him he must get well and strong so he might come south some time to visit them. Frank thanked him and smiled at him. But Jeanne held Frank close to her for a few moments and her tears dropped on his silky hair. "Good-bye, little Frank," she said so softly that no one but Frank heard. "I am sorry that we cannot do something nice for you." For a little time Frank clung to her, then released her. "You have done something nice for me," he said, and his face was radiant. "You have been good to a blind boy, and you will be always good to my Joe Pete!" Jeanne wiped her eyes hastily. She must be as brave as he, though they both knew intuitively that this was a last good-bye. Jerry called to her to come or they would be late. She called another good-bye to Mabel and the children and hurried away.

When they reached the store Jerry gave the key of the hunting lodge to Joe Pete. "Here, son," he said. "It's yours for keeps. I hope you have as happy a time there when it comes your turn as we've had." Their farewell to the boy was quiet and without effusion, but very sincere. "Remember, Joe Pete, that our home is yours," they said again, held his hand in a warm clasp, and left him. Joe Pete did not go down to the dock to see them get on the mail boat. He could not. Mr.

Vargatte looked at him sympathetically, then followed the others and left him alone in the store for a while.

It was as though Jerry and Jeanne took the good weather with them when they went away from the Island: October was a rainy, cold month. The leaves turned from green to dull yellow and fell too soon from the trees, to lie in sodden, quickly rotting masses on the ground. There were none of those scarlet and bronze colors which Joe Pete loved so dearly; just gray, wet, dreary days, and there came no smoke-hazy, warm Indian summer.

Snow fell early in November and the Indians' predictions of an early "freeze in" came true. Big John had to pull his boat out on the shore a month before the usual time, and going to town with the mail became a hazardous job. It froze and thawed, froze and thawed. There was too much ice in the river for safe navigation with a small boat, yet it was not strong enough to bear a man's weight. Theophile Vargatte was glad that he had brought his winter supplies down early.

In December Big John brought disturbing reports of a strange epidemic that was ravaging the town. Flu the doctors called it and they had been unable to hold it in check. Deaths were increasing in number every day. Hotels were turned into hospitals, and the schools were closed.

Just before Christmas twenty lumberjacks came down from town looking for work in the camps. They had been ferried by Indians across the steamboat channel where the water ran too swiftly to freeze, and had

tramped down the length of the Island. They came into the store, asked the direction to the camp, and bought something to eat. Mrs. Vargatte waited on them and asked them for news from the outside. The men told her that the flu epidemic was out of all control in the town and there were not enough doctors and nurses to care for the sick.

The Islanders afterward blamed these lumberjacks for carrying the disease to the Island, but no one really knew how it came to them. Mrs. Vargatte was the first one to be taken ill with it. A few days after she had waited on the men she complained of pains in her head and back and legs. She coughed and had a high fever, and grew so weak that her husband was seriously alarmed. He had one of the Big John girls stay with her while he made a trip to town with Big John to get a doctor for her. But the town could not spare a doctor. They gave him some medicine and warned him of the contagious nature of the disease.

Mrs. Vargatte was ill only a few days when Armand became sick. Mr. Vargatte was distracted and left the management of the store entirely to Joe Pete. The disease spread rapidly. Everyone who came into the store begged for medicine and reported that some new person was stricken. There was not a home in the Settlement that did not have one or more sick. The Indian homes were hardest hit. They were crowded, low, damp, and poorly ventilated. They were not clean. Big John went over the whole Island, warning, helping, advising; but they died by dozens. Whole families

were sick at one time, and in many isolated Indian homes the dead lay with the living, who were too ill to bury them. Mary and her two older children died. Word came that Charlotte had died and Sam had buried her. Joe Pete asked Sam, when he saw him later, if it were true and Sam said it was. He grinned evilly as he told Joe Pete that Jaakkola was ill, alone in Sam's old cabin. Joe Pete could hardly believe him, for Jaakkola had been at their cabin but a few days earlier and had seemed perfectly well. Sam saw his incredulity and was delighted.

"Why is he alone?" asked Joe Pete. "Where is Mrs. Jaakkola?"

"She is dead," said Sam bluntly, and somehow Joe Pete winced at the hatred running through the voice of this outcast Indian. Sam continued, fairly gloating, "He is mine now, Joe Pete. Now he shall so know the feeling of helpless ones that he will never forget!"

But Joe Pete could not bear to listen. "Don't tell me any more, Sam," he begged, and Sam left him. Joe Pete could not help feeling pity for even this hated foreigner who was lying ill at the mercy of Sam and with everyone too much concerned with his own sick ones to think of him.

Joe Pete, warned by Big John, had begged Mabel to keep away from others who were ill. But he reached the cabin one night to find her in bed and burning with fever. When questioned, Abe told him that she had been at Mary's cabin helping her the week before Mary died. Joe Pete did not blame her for he knew that

Mary had been a loyal friend of Mabel's. But he was worried. Mabel was very ill all that night and at times was out of her mind. The next morning Joe Pete told Abe what he must do for his mother, and was somewhat eased by the confident reply of that little fellow that he could do as well for her as Joe Pete could.

Joe Pete was away only long enough to tell Mr. Vargatte that his mother was ill and he must stay home with her for a while. Mrs. Vargatte was still very weak but was improving, and Armand was also getting better; so Mr. Vargatte could spare Joe Pete. Young John had returned to the Island and could help if necessary while Joe Pete was away. Mr. Vargatte gave him some medicine and he hurried home.

But just in the short time that Joe Pete had been away, Mabel had become worse, and Abe's confidence in himself had been badly shaken. Mabel would not stay in bed and Abe had not been strong enough to make her. In his flurry over her rebellion he had forgotten to keep the fire going. When Joe Pete arrived he found Mabel sitting in the rocker, shivering with cold, and muttering wildly to herself. She thought he was Dawas and was delighted to see him. With Abe's help he got her back into bed, covered her warmly, built a quick fire, and coaxed her to swallow the medicine Mr. Vargatte had given him. Abe and Frank sat quietly watching him and listening to the things their mother said. Joe Pete hated to have them hear her, but he could not send them out of doors. That whole day Joe Pete worked over his mother, but even he could see that she was

getting worse all the time. Her throat became so swollen that she could not swallow. Then Joe Pete could only sit and watch her helplessly.

At dusk he had Abe wrap himself up in a blanket and lie on the other bed which Jerry had given Joe Pete from one of the camps. Later he persuaded Frank to lie down beside Abe. When he knew they were both asleep, he was relieved and settled down to his all-night vigil. But when midnight came, Frank awakened and crept softly over to the bench where Joe Pete sat and told him he too was ill—that all day he had felt queer. Joe Pete was dismayed and reproached the blind boy because he had not told him sooner. He could only wrap him warmly and give him the medicine that his mother could not take. Frank lay quiet, uncomplaining. Joe Pete could see that he was feeling miserable and held his hand close. Toward morning a howling blizzard suddenly came down out of the north. Joe Pete had to push the table against the door to keep it closed against the force of the wind, and the window shook until he thought it would fall out of its frame.

The noise of the storm seemed to reach Mabel's wandering mind, for she kept muttering, as though she thought someone was knocking for admittance, "Come in! Come in! Come in, Dawas!" Her voice was husky and became fainter as the night waned, and Joe Pete knew she was dying. As the first light of day came dimly through the window she called wildly, "Dawas! See my small papoose, my Joe Pete." It was the old tone that Joe Pete had once known and loved.

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He went to her quickly, but even as he moved toward her she died. Somehow she now seemed the mother he used to know. He looked down at her for a long moment, and his hands trembled as he instinctively covered her face from sight.

The wind increased to a wild, furious gale during the day. No one could get to them through the beating, blinding snow. Joe Pete battled to the wood-pile and back to the cabin again and was exhausted with the effort it required. Abe asked once what had happened to his mother and why Joe Pete had covered her face, but was content with Joe Pete's answer that she had gone away, leaving behind her the old body which was useless to her now on the Black Trail where only the spirit walks. Frank listened to Joe Pete's explanation and smiled. He tried obediently to eat the food Joe Pete had offered him, but could not. His chest was filled with an agony that made his muscles twitch spasmodically; yet he would not allow a sound of pain to escape. Joe Pete knew what he was enduring and marvelled at the strength of will enclosed in that frail body. He could only sit and talk with the suffering boy and hope that someone would get through the drifts in time to help him.

At dusk a terrific blast of wind shook the cabin. The door flew open and a cloud of light, feathery snowflakes sprayed into the room. Frank listened to the roar of the wind and shivered under his blankets. Joe Pete closed the door and went over to him. "Are you cold, my small Frank?" he asked.

"No, Joe Pete; I am not cold. But the pain is very bad and is taking me too quickly far away from you. I do not want to go, Joe Pete, though I know it is best for both of us."

Joe Pete could do nothing but hold his hand tight. He felt the fingers shaking in his own, yet could not control his voice to speak to the child. Frank began to talk as if to himself. "The wind is strong. It makes much noise and the snow is deep. And I am a blind one! How shall I find my way alone on that Black Trail, Joe Pete? Our mother will not wait for me."

Joe Pete knew that Frank was fast becoming weaker, and also knew it was useless to pretend to the child that he was not. He could not take time to think of this new sorrow that was on its way to him. "I think our mother loved us again at that moment when she went, little Frank," he forced himself to reply through his tight throat. "Even you she loved, Frank. I am sure she will wait for you at the End's Edge and help you along the Trail. It will not seem black to my small, brave blind one!"

"Our mother cannot hear me call to her in this loud storm, my Joe Pete," the child said despairingly, and shook with fear.

"She will know you are coming and will wait for you," insisted Joe Pete wildly. Frank must not go, afraid, out into the dark! "She will wait, Frank. She will wait. The Great Spirit will tell her you are coming, too."

Frank understood that Joe Pete was breaking under

it all. Because he loved Joe Pete greatly, he forced himself to become quieter. "Will you let me take with me the marble with the white lamb inside, Joe Pete? I would not be afraid if I might hold it."

Abe sat up alertly to listen. Joe Pete groaned. "I have lost it, my little Frank. You might have it, but I do not know where it is."

"Abe and I know where it is," Frank startled him by saying. "I hid it in the corner under the little bed of Elizabeth, that I might have it always."

Joe Pete waited. After a time Frank went on. "I was lonesome for you, Joe Pete," he pleaded in excuse for himself. "You were away all day, and the marble brought you nearer to me, so I kept it. Abe wanted me to give it back to you, but I could not."

Joe Pete turned to Abe with a new warmth in his eyes for him. So Abe had lied for Frank. Had let Joe Pete believe he had taken the marble rather than betray Frank. "Will you get it for me, Abe?" he asked. Abe brought the marble to him, and Joe Pete put it in Frank's hands. "It is yours to keep forever, Frank. Forever!" he promised. "Hold it close and remember your Joe Pete until he follows you."

Soon after Joe Pete gave him the marble, Frank fell asleep, and though Joe Pete and Abe waited by his side, he never wakened from that sleep. When Joe Pete knew that he would not waken, he sat wide-eyed and wondered if his mother had waited for Frank or if the blind child were even now stumbling alone and unguided over a new Trail . . .



In the morning Big John and Young John broke through the huge drifts to the cabin. They worked long to make a grave in the frozen earth deep enough to shelter Mabel and the child. Then they went into the cabin where Joe Pete sat dully and called to him to come.

Like one who walks in a dream, he allowed himself to be warmly wrapped and led from the cabin. He watched as unconcernedly as though it were all unreal when Big John—following the Indian custom in time of plague—set fire to the cabin, and the flames from it flared out and set the spruce trees at the door blazing and crackling like huge torches. Again Big John said, "Come," and Joe Pete turned and tried to follow. Desperately he strove to keep on his feet, but over and over he stumbled and fell. Finally he was too weary, and could not rise again. Big John turned and came back to him. "You go on with that small Abe," he told Young John. "I will bring our worn Joe Pete."

Joe Pete saw Young John and Abe go on, hand in hand. Big John helped him to his feet; then, as he used to do, the big man stooped and gathered the slender Joe Pete in his arms. "None will know, my small Joe Pete," he soothed, "that Big John will carry you home. Home, my Joe Pete, home!" And as he had also done when he was a child, Joe Pete put his thin arms around Big John's neck and pressed his head against Big John's shoulder. Ah, here was a refuge! Here at last was rest!

He never knew when they put him to bed, nor did

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he have any idea of the long weeks he lay there while the Big Johns used all their skill to keep him from following his mother and Frank over the Black Trail. They knew there was happiness and attainment yet in the plan for Joe Pete and knew that they must keep him with them.

But he did know that when the doctor, whom Theophile Vargatte had finally persuaded to come from town, said he would get well, Big John put his head down on the Frenchman's friendly shoulder, and neither was ashamed of the joy which shone openly through their wet eyes.

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### XXIII

### MRS. SIMPSON

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It was spring again. The Islanders stoically put the thought of sickness and sorrow behind them and began to live anew. Strong fragrant winds blew from the northwest and the blue lake was tipped with white splashes of foam. Joe Pete was much better. Never had he felt so well in his life, as if there were within him an inexhaustible fountain of strength. He had wanted to return to his work in the store as soon as he felt well enough, but his friends would not listen to him. Young John had come back to the Island to help his family when they were all sick with the flu, and had stayed to work in the store again; so the Big Johns and Vargattes had other plans for Joe Pete now. The doctor from the city had told them that Joe Pete must have a summer of rest out of doors or he would never fully recover from the years of strain he had endured.

Joe Pete sat at the window in the Big John living room, staring out into the sunshine, watching Big John's motor boat anchored a short distance from shore, as it plunged and soared high again on the crystal-clear, green-blue waves. There was something bird-like about its motions that interested him intensely. Out in the deep, black channel a continuous line of

huge red or black freighters plowed serenely past on their way up to Lake Superior. There was color everywhere and he loved it. Sea gulls called from far above him, planing beautifully into the wind like silver arrows. Joe Pete thought that there was no other bird that could fly so wonderfully as the sea gull. Miss Delaramie had once sung an Indian song to him, which began

“From the land of the sky-blue water—”

He had always felt that this was the land of that song. No matter where he might go, or what he might learn of loveliness in other places, he would always hold the beauty of the Island close to him, and the wonder of this ever-changing water. He had known hunger, cold, illness, and bitter sorrow here; yet the Island was his home, and some day, if the Great Spirit so willed, it would again be the home of the tribe. His ambition had flamed high again within him as his strength had returned, and a letter from Jerry and Jeanne, renewing their offer of a home and school to him, now that he was free, had fanned the flame of his desire into a thing which actually burned him. He wanted to go immediately to Jerry, but he would do as his friends advised and rest during the summer in preparation. He had written to Jerry telling him he was coming, but he had not written that he was worried as to where he would obtain the money to pay his train fare down to the town where Jerry lived, and also to buy some very necessary clothes. Later in the summer he might find some work which would meet his expenses. He knew

that the impractical Big John would never think of these until it was too late; and he would not borrow from Mr. Vargatte.

Big John had planned that Abe should stay with them until Joe Pete returned, but Joe Pete believed Abe when he said he could take care of himself. Since Frank's death there had been a better understanding between Abe—the indifferent one—and Joe Pete; a warmer friendship that had brought to light a hidden fineness in Abe that Joe Pete had never suspected was there until it had blossomed under Joe Pete's very evident approval of his kindness to Frank. There had never before been any need of it, but Abe had developed a real sense of responsibility during Joe Pete's illness. Feeling that Big John was doing much more for both of them than he should, Abe helped in every way he could devise, and he was as ingenious at this new form of amusement as he had been before in his trickery. The Big Johns had come to depend on him immeasurably. He was aloof and was never affectionate, even momentarily, but they all realized from his changed actions that underneath his diffidence and independence was a high regard for them all. Joe Pete felt entirely at ease about leaving Abe behind, knowing now that Abe would carry his full share of duties. In fact, Abe had already tried to induce Young John to promise that he would go to the camps in the winter so Abe might have the job in the store, and had even tentatively broached the subject to Mr. Vargatte. Joe Pete smiled when Young John told him about it; it was so like

Abe. He would find a way to get whatever he wanted. And everything was at last turning out as it should.

The previous day Joe Pete had for the first time since his illness walked to the store with Abe. The Vargattes were as glad to see him as if he were a returned son. Armand and Joe Pete held each other's hands for a long time in their joy at being together again. The flu had taken its victims from almost every home on the Island, but it had spared these two who loved each other, though Armand was not yet strong. Abe watched them all and seemed pleased at their delight, even though he was not included in the demonstration. Mr. Vargatte seemed to have become very fond of Abe and took him down to the dock with him.

As Joe Pete was leaving the store, he came face to face with Jaakkola. The foreigner would not answer his greeting. He was thin, and furtive in his actions. Mr. Vargatte had told Joe Pete that for some reason he could not fathom Jaakkola was trying to sell his holdings on the Island and could not find a buyer. But Joe Pete knew the reason for it. Jaakkola was already showing the effects of Sam's silent persecution, which was yet within the law. Joe Pete hoped the foreigner would leave the Island before Sam lost his limited amount of patience and resorted to other means. There were so many other islands in the river which no one wanted, and to any of these Jaakkola could take his settlers and found his little foreign colony. Yet Joe Pete could not help wondering about the fire, and why



this man who had no love for law or the government had appealed to the law in his first emergency. Then he put it out of his mind. Sam was handling this problem. His was to get once more the Island for the tribe.

June came and with it Joe Pete's sixteenth birthday. They were sitting at a supper in his honor when a knock came at the door. Big John as usual called "Come!" No one accepted his invitation to enter and the knock was repeated. Big John looked at Abe, and before he could ask, Abe ran and opened the door. Mr. Vargatte and a strange white woman stood on the threshold. "Is Big John home?" they heard him ask Abe; so Big John—knowing that something unusual must have happened—himself went to the door and invited them to enter, as courteously as Mr. Vargatte might have done. Mr. Vargatte introduced the lady. "This is Mrs. Simpson," he said to them all.

The name brought back to Joe Pete the remembrance of the red-headed man who had come occasionally to the cabin, and a red silk dress worn by his mother, which he for some reason hated; but it all seemed very long ago and the memory was not distinct. The woman smiled at them as she spoke. "How do you do," she said, and her voice was pleasantly musical. Joe Pete would have liked Frank to hear this lovely voice. Big John offered the best chair in the house as he answered, "Bo' jou'. Bo' jou'." Mrs. Big John shook hands. But the same thought was in the minds of all. Why

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had this woman come to the Island? What did she want of them?

Mr. Vargatte put an end to their curiosity. "I had a letter from Mrs. Simpson a long time ago, Big John, and did not answer it. It was when we were all sick with the flu, and I was too filled with worry to either answer her letter or ask you what to do." Then, turning to Mrs. Simpson, "The flu was very bad on the Island. For a long time we could think of nothing else, and we are only now regaining our wits." She nodded, and he turned back to Big John. "Now, Big John, my old friend, she has come for her own answer, and after she has told you what she wants, you are the one to give that answer."

Big John was very evidently uneasy. "And what does he want, this lady?" he asked very carefully in English.

"We will allow her to tell," suggested Mr. Vargatte, "and you will then answer her, Big John. This is not my affair. I came but to bring her to you." He bowed to Mrs. Simpson. "Whenever you please now, Madam."

Mrs. Simpson faced them, and a sadness was in her eyes that drew them to her. She too had known sorrow, though she was so beautifully clothed, so well cared for. She came straight to her request. "This is what I wish to know," she said quietly; "I came to find a child named Elizabeth Shingoos."

Joe Pete felt his throat tighten. He clutched the

sides of his chair to keep his hands from shaking. Why did this woman want to know about the little, dead Elizabeth? None of the Indians answered and Mr. Vargatte would not. He had said it was not his affair. Mrs. Simpson looked from one suddenly empty face to another and knew they would not answer until she explained why she wanted the child—and her explanation must be a good one. Her eyes searched the thin, fine-featured face of the boy who sat so rigid, and unexpectedly she found herself explaining to him.

"It is a long story," she said, "but I will try to tell it as briefly as possible. You probably all knew my husband. He built a hunting lodge near here. We had two children, Betty and James. When my husband came home from this Island that last time he was changed somehow toward me and also toward the children. Then Betty died, and he was almost crazy. He talked about his 'punishment.' He was too sensitive, and though he knew that I realized something was worrying him terribly, he never told me what it was—and I could not ask!"

She paused a moment, and they knew that her thoughts were going far back and she was living sad memories over again. But none of them spoke. Sad things were the common lot of all. Big John moved restlessly in his chair. It creaked under his shifting weight. She glanced at him and forced herself to go on.

"This flu that you speak about came to us some years ago. My husband died. I had only James left,

but I was thankful for him. Life was not quite empty. But how I missed my little girl!"

Tears stood in her eyes, but she would not wipe them away.

"The boy was dark, but Betty had hair like her father's," she said rather pitifully, as though that fact explained everything. "Last November we sold our home. It was too large for only two persons. I was going through some old things of my husband's, and found a partly written letter. It had Mr. Vargatte's name on it, and he had told me often of Mr. Vargatte. The letter spoke about Elizabeth Shingoos, and he had worked out a plan by which there was a chance that he might be able to adopt her without my ever knowing who she was. I wrote to Mr. Vargatte, but as he has already told you, he did not reply. I knew I could not get to the Island until the ice broke up, but when June came I could wait no longer. I have come to get Elizabeth Shingoos, if you will let me have her."

Once more she looked about the room at that silent, listening group. Their faces were still empty! She looked pleadingly at the boy who was clutching the sides of his chair. He looked straight into her eyes, wistfully, wonderingly, yet did not answer. He was finer than the others—but he too was Indian! Then Mrs. Simpson knew she must go the whole distance with them, and bared her secret.

"Elizabeth Shingoos was my husband's baby," she said with her head high lifted. "I would have taken her if I had known, because I loved him more than the

rights and wrongs of convention, but—he was afraid to tell me. Now that I know about her I want her. I feel that I have a right to my husband's child."

She looked again at Joe Pete who was about to answer her, when Big John interrupted. "He's Indun baby, that Lizbet. You want Indun papoose?"

Joe Pete stared at him wonderingly, but Mr. Vargatte smiled. He understood his big friend. Mrs. Simpson answered Big John. "Yes, Mr. Big John, I want her, no matter what she is. She belongs to my husband. Tell me where she is, and that I may have her. Do not keep me waiting!"

And now as she looked about the group, there was a response in faces that fairly glowed. This woman had been tested. She was honest and fair. Mabel's story could be told her, and she would feel no resentment about the cheating of Simpson. She would understand. Big John pulled his chair closer to hers. "That Lizbet die long time ago," he told her kindly but abruptly, true to the Indian fashion, getting bad news told quickly. "He have the red hairs, that one, too, but medicine man don' like him and put a black curse on him. He fall in the Bog. Mabel don' wan' us tell. He wan' the money Simpson sen' him for that Lizbet and he wan' the luck. So he don' wan' us tell."

For a moment they were afraid this white woman was going to weep over a useless one like Elizabeth. But she did not. "The poor little child! Her luck was black enough without having more put upon her. If I had only known!" She turned and stared through

the window a few moments until she could control herself and hide from them her disappointment. They were reassured. She was not the kind that bewails its grief in public. They accepted her as a friend.

"Too bad you wan' that Lizbet w'en he's dead," consoled Big John. Joe Pete still did not speak.

Mrs. Simpson turned to him. "What is your name?" she asked, frankly curious. "Who are you?"

"I am Joe Pete Shingoes," he answered. "Lizbet was my sister."

"Tell me about her, please," she begged.

So Joe Pete told her all the details about Elizabeth that he thought she would like to hear, but did not say that the little girl was deaf. When Big John found that Joe Pete deliberately kept this back, he too did not tell it. Finally Mrs. Simpson rose to go. "I am staying with Mrs. Vargatte," she said, "and I must speak again with Joe Pete and Mr. Big John before I go away. Will you both be so kind as to come there tomorrow and talk with me? I cannot talk any more just now—"

Big John hastily promised for both, and Mrs. Simpson went out with Mr. Vargatte.

Somehow Joe Pete dreaded tomorrow's talk with this woman from the south. He did not want to go back into the past with its misery and unpleasantness. But the moment he saw her again he was sure there would be no going back into the past again. There were no tears, nor any sadness. She was a finely bred woman, talking over with them a situation which she would

like to improve if they would accept her help. She asked Joe Pete what his plans were, and offered him her home and influence. She gave no reason for this desire on her part, but they knew that she greatly wanted to atone for the small Elizabeth. Joe Pete told her he was to live with Jerry. She did not try to change his plans, but asked him to keep in touch with her and let her know if at any time he needed assistance. She offered to help Big John with Abe while Joe Pete was away at school, but Big John told her that he and Mr. Vargatte could manage it easily. When she found there was nothing she could do, she asked the date of Joe Pete's departure, wished the boy good luck, and said good-bye to both.

As they walked home again Big John spoke fervently, and Mrs. Simpson received the highest praise Big John could put into words, "By God, Joe Pete, he's damn' fine feller, that Mrs. Simpson!"

A few weeks later there came from town by the mail a huge box addressed to Joe Pete Shingoos. Big John carried it home and placed it in the middle of the floor where the whole family grouped curiously around it. Joe Pete unfastened the knots in the cord and opened the box. On top was a layer of soft, colored paper such as Joe Pete had never seen before. Under the paper were two suits of clothes, one gray, one blue; four silky white shirts; stockings; underwear; caps; a warm overcoat; handkerchiefs. Nothing was forgotten.

Last in the box was an envelope. On the outside was written "For Joe Pete." He opened it, and there

dropped out a long green railroad ticket with the date of his departure stamped upon the back of it, and a small white card. On the card were two words, "From Elizabeth."

Big John held the coats while Joe Pete tried them on. They fitted perfectly and they knew Mrs. Simpson must have asked Mr. Vargatte for the right size. They were the first new clothes that Joe Pete had ever worn. Into the vest pocket of the soft gray suit Joe Pete slipped the little white card, "From Elizabeth."

XXIV

JENNIE BIG JOHN

Summer was almost over. The nights became frosty and cold. The leaves were turning gold and scarlet. And now with the first days of September again came a time that Joe Pete had waited and longed for, and had many times been discouraged into thinking would never come for him. At last the dream that he had held close all these years had come true. Tomorrow he was going away to school. This was his last day on the Island. For two years he would be gone from it, and when he returned he would be eighteen years old—a man, full-grown and ready to bear a man's burden.

He woke early in the morning, while the others slept. Abe was sharing his bed, and Joe Pete lay quiet, hoping not to waken him, so that in his old fashion he could hold his joy close for a while in silence, pondering over and anticipating it fully. He and Big John were starting early the next morning to catch the first train out of town. He had never ridden on a train—had never even seen one. He had never been to town except for that one time when he had remained on the dock while he had waited for his mother. How strange it would be to live now in a town, amidst strange sights and sounds and people! He wondered if he would ever

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get used to it all and what Jerry would think of his new clothes which fitted him so easily that he was not conscious of them at all. He pulled Jerry's letter out from under the pillow where he had put it the night before after memorizing the address, and read it again. How kind Jerry had always been to him! Some of his happiest childish memories were of Jerry. How hard he intended to work to make up to them for their goodness to him! Sentences in the letter seemed to stand out. "Jeanne has made all the arrangements for you to enter right away. . . . With her help you can do it easily. . . . Do not leave the depot until we come for you. . . . We will be so glad to have you with us." They made him eager for this new life that was coming to him.

Finally he could not wait any longer. He rose quietly, dressed, and crept downstairs. Jennie Big John was getting his breakfast for him. "I heard you moving about," she said, "and I knew you could not longer remain in bed on your last day with us." Her voice was as lovely and low as Mrs. Simpson's cultured one. They laughed at the absurdity of their eating breakfast before the others. They had always been such good friends. He would miss her. She might even be married when he returned. Married! Jennie married! At the thought he suddenly knew that ever since Jerry had told him the hunting lodge was to be sometime his, he had unconsciously planned that Jennie Big John was to share it with him. Jennie was careful and neat, ready to accept the newer, better ways. Any cabin that she

kept would be as immaculate as Mrs. Vargatte's home. No one could ask for greater perfection than that! Joe Pete reached out for her hand. "Will you wait for me, Jennie?" he asked anxiously. "I want you to marry me when I come back again."

Her eyes grew round and serious. "Why, yes, Joe Pete," she said, very earnestly. "My father and I have known always that we would marry. That has been his plan for us since your mother brought you to us when you were a tiny baby. I will wait for you until you are ready." Her frank reply pleased Joe Pete. They laughed together joyously.

Later in the morning Joe Pete went over to say good-bye to the Vargattes. There would not be time the next morning. Mr. Vargatte wept as openly as his wife. "We are proud of you, Joe Pete," he said warmly. "Every day we will think of you and wish you success."

Armand and Joe Pete went out on the stoop where they might be alone when they said their farewells. They looked deep into each other's eyes. "It is very hard to let you go, my friend," Armand said huskily, "but for a little time we must part." Joe Pete could only nod, his throat too tight for speech. This kind, kind Armand, who had shared his home, his pleasures, and his parents' love with Joe Pete—an Indian! "I will be waiting for you, Joe Pete," he heard Armand saying, "and whatever you may try to do when you return, I will help you." He kissed Joe Pete on both cheeks and went back into the store.

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Big John stayed home all day to talk with Joe Pete; to tell him all the numberless things he wanted to say before Joe Pete went away from him; then found that he could say nothing. It was a relief to all of them when Sam strolled in for a few minutes.

"That Jaakkola will soon go now," he told Joe Pete, "and when he goes the others like him will follow."

"He cannot go, Sam, until he can sell his lands," Joe Pete remonstrated. "Do not drive him too far. He will lose everything if he goes, and I am sure he will not leave until he can get his money."

"He will go, Joe Pete," Sam said confidently.

"Be careful of the law, Sam," Joe Pete warned him. "Do not let it get you again." But Sam only laughed.

In the late afternoon Joe Pete told the Big Johns that he wanted to see his own clearing once more before he left the Island. He had not once been back after Big John had carried him away. He called to Jennie, asking her to come with him. She agreed willingly. Together they went through the Settlement and climbed the long hill. Joe Pete told her about the old Nokomis, and Jennie was pleased at the thought of the small Joe Pete staying with the Old Woman despite his fear. Joe Pete had always done the thing he started out to do and always would. She looked at him slantingly from the corners of her eyes, and reaching out to him, touched his fingers delicately with her own slender ones.

At the place where the trail entered his clearing from the woods, Joe Pete asked Jennie to wait for him. He felt that he must go on alone. It was nearing sunset,

and he longed for his last, sad glimpse of the place to be graven in his memory with the warmth of color. He left the sheltering screen of trees and strode out into his clearing; then stopped, marvelling at such beauty as he had never seen there before. In such loveliness there could be no thought of past sadness: it was an omen of future happiness.

There lay the clearing under the golden setting sun in a haze of shimmering, weaving light that seemed alive. Slim birch trees reflected the sun-flame from their silver bark. And everywhere was growing luxuriantly that wondrous, rose-magenta beauty of the north: the fireweed, which comes only where there has been bitter sterilization of soil by fire, the sign of the resurrection of hope and a symbol of attainment! There was not a charred stick showing where the cabin had stood. The ominous mocking spruce trees that had kept guard at the door were gone. He could see no mounds marking the place where Big John had hastily covered Mabel and Frank. All was covered by this transforming glory of rose color that shaded into purple under the dark tree shadows on the edge of the enclosing forest.

Joe Pete drew a long breath. His joyful relief was so deep that it was painful. And suddenly, as he stood gazing rapturously, the sun began to drop below the tops of the trees; and as it sank down over the edge of the world, there was duplicated in the sky above, the rose and purple splendor of the clearing. Joe Pete lifted his inspired face to that color. He realized that the Great Spirit had given him a sign, a symbol that

he was to work into the weaving of his new life! For this short space of time Manitou gave him that supreme happiness of knowing absolutely that his dreams would in time come true, that his hopes would be realized. Stooping, he plucked one fragile bloom and held it high toward the swiftly setting sun. "I hold thy promise in my hand, Manitou," he called exultantly, "and, holding it, fear shall never walk with me on my Trail of Life. I thank thee, Great Spirit!"

Even as he called, the sun vanished below the horizon and darkness began to creep out of the woods. But what was darkness after such a vision?

Through the soft colorful dusk came a call that to the boy was like the combining of all woods music. "Come, Joe Pete! It is time we started!" Like a soft echo to that call came the thin, dainty flute-note of a late-lingering white-throat. Joe Pete serenely turned and left the clearing.

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